

DAVID EWERT

# Honour Such People

PHILIPPIANS 2:29

Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies  
Winnipeg, Manitoba



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by

David Ewert

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## PREFACE

The Scriptures exhort us to remember our leaders who spoke God's Word to us. In the following pages I have tried to follow this biblical injunction by sketching the lives of eight such leaders. They all belong to a former generation, and our young people today know very little about them. These men of faith have left us a rich spiritual legacy. However, if we are "to imitate their faith," as the writer to the Hebrews puts it (Heb. 13:7), we must know something about their life and service.

With the exception of Jacob H. Quiring, all of the Bible teachers mentioned in this volume have gone to be with the Lord, after serving their generation. But, like Abel of old, although they are dead, they continue to speak to us (Heb. 11:4).

Undoubtedly the reader will ask: Why these eight? Surely there were many other teachers of Scripture in their life-time. True, there is a certain arbitrariness about the choice of names, and I offer my apologies to those who might have been included. The reason for focusing on these eight is quite personal: they were all colleagues of mine in the Bible teaching ministry in Canada.

The ministry of these Bible teachers spans roughly the half century between 1920 and 1970. All of them (with the exception of J. H. Quiring) were Russian born and came to Canada in the immigration that brought thousands of Mennonites from the Soviet Union to our land (Cornelius Wall and his family came to the United States, but later came to Canada to teach).

Several of the men mentioned in this volume were considerably older than I. Among them are those who were my teachers before they became my colleagues and they had a profound influence on me in the formative years of my life. All of them were members of the Mennonite Brethren Church, although their ministry reached far beyond the confines of their denomination.

The order in which the following biographical sketches appear

was determined by their age. It is not necessarily the order in which I encountered these men of God, either as teachers or as colleagues.

My first Bible teachers (as far as formal studies are concerned) were Bernhard Sawatzky, Jacob Quiring and John A. Toews. This was at the Coaldale Bible School (1939-42). From here I went on to the Winkler Bible School, where Abraham Unruh was my favorite Bible teacher.

Although I was younger than all of these men, by God's gracious providence they became my colleagues in the Bible teaching ministry for shorter or longer periods of time, either in the La Glace or Coaldale Bible schools in Alberta, or at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Manitoba. I have had a host of colleagues over the years whose friendship I cherish greatly, but in this volume I am restricting myself to the half century from 1920-1970, and to Bible teachers.

Shorter or longer biographies of several of the men listed here have already appeared in print. They have proved helpful as resource material. Also, some of them have left us a considerable legacy of published as well as unpublished materials. Beyond that there are still people around, particularly family members, who remember these servants of God, and who have contributed valuable information about them. I gratefully acknowledge their help. Also, I thank Dr. Abe Dueck, Director of the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, for seeing this volume through the press.

The portrait of these men which I have tried to draw in the following pages is a reflection of my own encounters with them. I cannot help but think that my life would have been much poorer had not these men crossed my path when I began my Bible teaching ministry. I can only thank God for the grace that came to me through them.

Richard Holloway writes: "I often think of the strange, hurting wistfulness of it all: all those glad lives and dancing feet, all gone down into the grave. But the thing that most wounds me is not their

dying . . . for that at least is recorded, is written down. . . . What despairs me is their living, their unremembered living. I grieve for all those lives which are not recalled . . . Every person has at least one book in him, the story of his own life. Every life is filled with incident and quiet heroism, with struggle and joy" (*A New Heaven*, p. 61).

"Honour such people," is the Pauline exhortation (Phil. 2:29). The following pages are a modest attempt to do just that.

David Ewert



Abraham H. and Katharina (Toews) Unruh

## 1

*Abraham H. Unruh (1878-1961)*

Abraham Unruh's forebears left Prussia in 1816, following the Napoleonic wars, and settled in Volhynia, a province of western Russia. From here Abraham's grandfather, Benjamin, and his family moved to the Mennonite colony of Molotschna in the Ukraine, where Abraham's father, Heinrich, was born. Eventually the family moved to the Crimea in search of land, settling in the village of Temir-Bulat, near the Black Sea port of Yevpatoria.

In due time Heinrich Unruh married Elizabeth Wall and together, like most Mennonites at that time, they tried their hands at agriculture. The Unruhs eventually had a family of ten children. Abraham, born in 1878, was the third youngest. By then his father had been appointed to the office of bishop in the Mennonite Church, responsible for several congregations in his district. As was the custom at that time, he served without remuneration, and since their land proved to be rather unproductive, the family suffered through years of poverty. Mennonite ministers in those days usually preached by reading published sermons; Unruh, however, broke with that tradition and prayerfully prepared his own sermons, giving them freshness and vitality.

Heinrich Unruh was a man of robust faith, but not of body. In 1883, at the young age of thirty-eight, he fell prey to a severe attack of bronchitis leaving a widow with ten children, the oldest only fifteen years of age. Abraham was five years old when his father died and frequently accompanied his weeping mother to his father's grave. The future of the family looked very bleak. The mother did not have the financial resources to bring up her large family. Foster homes for the younger children would have to be found.

Abraham's uncle, Cornelius Unruh, and his family lived in the Molotschna. In the providence of God this famous Mennonite

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educator was to have a profound influence on Abraham. The deep wounds of his father's death had not yet healed when Abraham was taken to uncle Cornelius, who treated him as one of his own sons. Unfortunately that could not be said of Mrs. Unruh, who made life for the little fellow rather miserable. In her eyes Abraham could do nothing right and he was often unjustly punished. (When she was old and widowed she apologized to Abraham for her treatment of him and he forgave her). The trauma of losing his father at a tender age and the separation from his mother left wounds in Abraham's heart that took many years to heal.

Uncle Cornelius taught in the secondary school in Ohrloff. He had studied in Switzerland, Moscow and the Ukraine, was fluent in German, French and Russian, and had written a number of textbooks for the Mennonite schools in Russia. Cornelius Unruh treated his nephew with much kindness and Abraham always remembered with gratitude what his uncle had done for him in the early years of his life. Cornelius was a man of high moral principles and attended church regularly, but he did not speak freely about his faith. However, on Sunday afternoons their home was open to the children of the community, when teachers from the Mennonite Brethren Church came to teach them the Word of God.

Close to Ohrloff was the village of Tiege where Abraham completed elementary school. Isaac Ediger, an outstanding teacher who was also a minister of the gospel, deeply influenced Abraham in these impressionable years. One Friday afternoon Ediger stood before his students and told them the story of his conversion. Abraham never forgot. When Ediger noticed that Abraham was a precocious lad, he enabled him to complete elementary school in five years.

Abraham was only twelve when he entered secondary school (Zentralschule in Ohrloff, where he was privileged to have his learned uncle, as well as other educators such as Johann Braeul and Johann Janzen, as his teachers. With plenty of natural wit, a bit of

extra enthusiasm, and much help and inspiration from his uncle Cornelius, Abraham completed secondary school when he was only fifteen, two years in advance of his class-mates. He was now ready to enter teacher's college in Halbstadt, Molotschna.

Uncle Cornelius never asked Abraham what he wanted to do in life; he simply assumed all along that he would become a teacher. And so, without many questions asked, Abraham began his teacher training at the ridiculously early age of fifteen. Until now he had lived in the home of his uncle and aunt, but now he lived in a dormitory with little supervision and had to learn how to handle this new freedom. He was only a youth and enjoyed the banter, the horseplay and the rowdiness his class-mates engaged in. Abraham was not yet a Christian, although his uncle and other teachers had taught him important ethical principles that had their roots in biblical teaching. Such teachings kept him from dissipating his energies with licentious living, even though he participated in some youthful pranks with considerable enthusiasm.

Teachers in the Mennonite colonies at that time were expected to uphold the moral standards of the community and Abraham resolved that he would become a good role model for his future students. Moreover, the teaching profession was held in high regard in Mennonite villages and those who aspired to this profession felt obligated to guard the dignity of their vocation. Abraham studied hard and after two years of pedagogical training he received his teaching certificate. He also wanted to obtain a Russian teacher's diploma, but for that he had to sit examinations several times before he achieved this goal.

In September, 1895, Abraham stepped into the classroom of an elementary school in the Crimean village of Menlertschik. The village lay close to Spat, where a large number of Mennonites had settled. Spat was on the main postal route that cut through the Crimea from north to south, not too far from the city of Simferopol. The seventeen year old teacher found his new responsibilities in the

classroom a bit frightening. The villagers looked at this youthful educator with a sharp eye, wondering what kind of example he would be for their children. In the village of Menlertschik lived an aunt, a sister of Abraham's mother, and that helped to soften his initiation into this new community. Before long he had won the confidence of the adults as well as the youth of the village.

Unruh had been separated from his widowed mother for some twelve years by now and he was delighted when he heard that she was willing to come and look after him and make up what she had not been able to do when he was a child. What she did not know at the time was that her son was in deep spiritual turmoil. He had come to the conviction that he needed to commit his life to Christ and was wrestling with the fundamental question: what must I do to be saved? Through the witness of several evangelists, among them the itinerant Mennonite Brethren minister, Jacob W. Reimer, Unruh responded to God's invitation in the gospel and yielded his life in faith and obedience to Christ. It was a hymn composed by Zinzendorf that gave him the assurance that salvation was a gift of grace: "Jesus, thy blood and righteousness, my beauty are, my glorious dress."

Unruh had learned from the Scriptures that faith in Christ called for a public confession of Christ's lordship. And so he decided to make his confession by being baptized. Although he had grown up in the Mennonite Church, several of the teachers and ministers who had helped him find the new life in Christ belonged to the Mennonite Brethren. Consequently Abraham applied for baptism in the Mennonite Brethren Church in Spat. After being duly examined by this congregation, he was immersed in the waters of the Salgir River. Although his mother belonged to the Mennonite Church, she was delighted with her son's decision and tried to help him in his spiritual development. Even before his baptism Abraham had upon occasion invited his pupils to the teacherage on Sunday afternoons for Bible studies and he had also told them about his conversion to

Christ. His mother was pleased with his clear-cut decision to become a follower of Jesus.

For eight years Unruh taught at Menlertschik, constantly seeking to hone his teaching methods. Repeatedly he enrolled in summer courses in nearby Simferopol or the more distant Perekop in order to upgrade his teaching credentials. Abraham took a rather different approach to discipline in the classroom than was customary at the time. Teachers were generally known for their harsh discipline—an approach which the Mennonite communities supported. Unruh, however, tried to befriend his students and he was rewarded for these efforts by a well-behaved and industrious classroom of learners.

Teaching in a small Mennonite village and living in a kind of cultural backwater at the end of the nineteenth century, Abraham often felt keenly the restrictions this put on his gifts and aspirations. It was, therefore, always a highlight when he could attend the monthly teachers' conventions where teachers, through workshops and lectures, tried to improve their teaching standards. To meet with kindred spirits and academics at these gatherings helped him to broaden his horizons and to lift his spirit.

After several years of teaching, during which he enjoyed the company of his loving mother, Unruh began to look for a marriage partner. In Spat he had seen Katharina Toews at a church conference. She sang solo parts in the church choir and Unruh had taken special notice of her. On one occasion he was invited for tea to the Toews home, where he had the opportunity to observe Katharina at closer range. It was not long before he developed a deep affection for this young woman and when he finally proposed marriage to her (dating was taboo in those days), she did not hesitate too long before she gave him an unequivocal yes. In 1900, when Abraham was twenty-two, he was united with Katharina in holy matrimony. For sixty years they walked hand in hand. It was the writer's privilege to attend their diamond wedding anniversary.

Mrs. Unruh was richly endowed with gifts of the more practical sort and in this way complemented her husband, who excelled in the classroom and the pulpit but was not very helpful around the house.

After the wedding Abraham's mother wondered whether she should leave, fearing that her new daughter-in-law might not like to have her with them all the time. Both Abraham and Tina (as he always called his wife) assured her however, that she was welcome to stay. Unruh thought later that much of the blessing he and Tina had experienced in their long life together stemmed from the noble manner in which Tina had treated her mother-in-law. Toward the end of her life Abraham's mother went to live with a daughter who lived in Tiege, Molotschna. When the famine struck in 1922 Abraham worried that his mother in the Ukraine might not have enough to eat. And so at great personal sacrifice he made his way by train to the Ukraine to bring her twenty pounds of flour. After walking eleven hours from the train station with his bag of flour, he was able to deliver his gift of love. In the fall of that year his mother died and Abraham felt this loss deeply; in particular he missed her prayers.

After teaching for eight years in Menlertschik, Unruh was invited to fill a teaching position in Barvenkovo, which lay in the Charkov province. Here he taught in the elementary school and later also in the *Kommerzschule* (trade-school), operated by Russians in cooperation with Mennonites. Abraham's brother Benjamin, who later became professor at the university in Karlsruhe, Germany, gave Abraham private tutoring to equip him for this somewhat more advanced school. Academically Unruh also learned much from his Russian colleagues, some of whom were well-trained. But the *Kommerzschule* was not a Christian or Mennonite school and Unruh's faith was repeatedly put to the test at this institution. Having lived in rather sheltered communities all his life, his years at Barwenkowo taught him how to live the Christian life in "the world." Although this was not always easy, it

helped him grow spiritually.

While at Barvenkovo the Unruhs experienced deep sorrow. Their first-born child, two-year old Elizabeth, was taken from them by death. One of Abraham's brothers, who was preparing for mission work in India, had just returned from the Baptist seminary in Hamburg and was able to share this time of grief with the family. He preached the funeral sermon on the text: "The Master is here and calls you."

Several years later death struck a second time. This time a four-year old son died of complications caused by goiter. Their eldest son, Abraham, had the misfortune of losing an eye when a boy threw a clod of earth in his face. These were trying times, but the Unruhs found comfort in the presence and promises of God.

In 1915 Unruh began service with the medical corps. Russia had declared war on Germany and its allies and since Mennonites had been promised exemption from military service they performed alternate services. A great many young men served in hospital trains. Unruh, however, was asked to fill an office position, first in Ekaterinoslav and later in Odessa, on the Black Sea. In 1917, after two years of service, the Revolution broke out and the war with Germany came to an end. Abraham then returned to his family in Barwenkowo, but found that anti-German feelings were running high among his Russian colleagues at the *Kommerzschule*. This tension was further exacerbated when the Germans temporarily occupied the Ukraine. Moreover, Barvenkovo was caught in the conflict between the Reds and the Whites following the Bolshevik Revolution.

On one occasion the family had to flee for safety and upon their return found their house devastated. All of Abraham's books and papers were torn to shreds. Interestingly, they found an envelope with 500 rubles in it (their tithe money) in the debris which the bandits had overlooked. When Unruh brought the money to the church, the leaders hesitated to receive the donation, for they saw

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how desperately the family needed this money. Abraham, however, insisted that it was money they had given to the Lord and he would not take it back.

Just about this time Abraham received a call to become the principal of the *Zentralschule* in Karassan, in the Crimea. Travel was not easy in those tumultuous days, but the Unruhs accepted the call to return home to the Crimea. The family with their meager belongings traveled all the way in a freight car. Unruh could not have foreseen that this move would be the beginning not only of a new chapter in his teaching experience but also of a Bible teaching ministry.

Karassan was the oldest Mennonite settlement in the Crimea and the only one (besides Spat) that had a secondary school. The first Sunday in Karassan Abraham was asked to preach the sermon in the Mennonite Church. He had done this kind of work in Barwenkowo and so it was not an altogether new experience for him. The elder of the church, Hermann Rempel, later was instrumental in forming the *Allianzgemeinde* (Evangelical Mennonite Brethren) and that explains his openness to preachers from other denominations.

Unruh enjoyed teaching at Karassan but felt drawn more and more to the preaching ministry. Not too far from Karassan, at Tschongraw, the Mennonite Brethren had just established a Bible school—something the Mennonites had not done in their more than one hundred year sojourn in Russia. After two years at Karassan, Abraham was invited to join the staff of this new institution. With their four sons and two daughters the Unruhs moved to Tschongraw, where Unruh began to teach the Scriptures to mature students past high school age. Although the Communist regime would not allow this school to function for very long, this Bible teaching stint changed the course of Unruh's life.

Unruh had been ordained to the lay ministry in Barwenkowo, where his well-prepared sermons were greatly appreciated. He had even ventured to preach among Russians (something not allowed

under the Tsars), and that brought him a short jail sentence. Had it not been for Russian friends he might have been exiled to Siberia. Under Lenin the state church lost its preferred status and Unruh repeatedly proclaimed the gospel among Russians in those tumultuous years following the Revolution.

The Bible training school in Tschongrow was founded by Johann G. Wiens, a returned missionary from India and a graduate of the Baptist seminary in Hamburg, Germany. War and revolution did not permit the Wienses to return to India and so in 1918 the *Friedenstimme* (a Mennonite publication read in all the German-speaking colonies of Russia) carried the announcement that a Bible school would be opening its doors in fall. Another Hamburg graduate, Heinrich J. Braun, joined Wiens in this new venture, as did Gerhard Reimer. Thirty-four students enrolled that first year. In 1920 Unruh joined the faculty. Students came from the Mennonite colonies scattered all over Russia and enrolled in a three-year course of training.

The school was supported entirely by voluntary donations and the teachers had to get along with very meager fare. Academically and spiritually it offered quality education, in spite of economic limitations, and had a profound impact on the lives of many men and women. From Tschongrow students went to the various parts of Russia with the gospel. Some paid for their witness with their lives during the Stalin era; others were able to emigrate and continued to serve the church in the new world. In 1924 the Communist government closed the school.

The Unruhs had by now come to the conclusion that there was no future for them in the Soviet Union and began to make plans to leave. A former Tschongrow student who had emigrated to Nebraska helped them with money to purchase tickets for travel to Canada. It was still possible at that time to leave Russia legally, if one could get the necessary exit papers and a visa to enter Canada. Abraham's brother Benjamin, who by now lived in Germany, knew

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the Canadian consul in Riga, Latvia, who did all he could to get the necessary documents for the Unruhs. Mercifully all went well. They traveled first to Riga and then on to Germany to meet their brother. In December, 1924, they boarded a passenger ship in Holland and, after a stormy voyage across the Atlantic, arrived in Canada in the midst of a cold winter.

The Unruhs had decided to make their home in Winkler, Manitoba. Winkler was a community in which many Mennonites who had come to Canada in the late nineteenth century had settled. For some strange reason these Mennonites did not always take kindly to the coming of these new Russian Mennonites in the 1920s. One reason may have been that some of these recent immigrants had a better education and overshadowed the church leaders of the older Canadian Mennonite communities. Unruh, however, had the grace to build bridges and his teaching gifts were recognized quickly by all Mennonites in the community and beyond. Almost immediately after their arrival in Winkler Unruh began a Bible teaching ministry. In the fall of 1925 thirteen students enrolled in what was to become the Winkler Bible School.

Gerhard Reimer, a former colleague from Tschongraw, joined Unruh for the second semester. Johann Wiens, who had founded the Tschongraw school, also came to Canada with his family and joined the teaching staff in Winkler. The curriculum was much the same as it had been in the Crimea and was modeled on the curriculum of the Baptist seminary in Hamburg. The Winkler Bible School was supported entirely by voluntary donations and student fees. This meant that Unruh frequently had to solicit funds, hoping, as he put it, that when he died he would, like the "beggar" in the parable, be carried into Abraham's bosom. In that first class of Bible students was the eldest son of the Unruhs, Abraham, who with his family was to spend most of his life as missionary to India.

As Unruh's preaching gifts became known he was invited for Bible conferences all over Manitoba and eventually to other

provinces in Canada. He was even invited to preach in churches and colleges in the United States (for several years he lectured regularly at Tabor College, Kansas). This helped to attract students to the Winkler school. I had heard Unruh preach in my home congregation in Coaldale on several occasions and made up my mind that some day I would also make my way to Winkler. This dream was fulfilled in 1942-43. Upon arrival I told Dr. Unruh that I was not interested in graduation but wanted to take as many of his subjects as possible. He was kind and wise enough to dissuade me and so I completed my fourth year at Winkler (I had already done three years in the Coaldale Bible School).

In the early 1940s the Canadian Mennonite Brethren Conference felt the need to establish a training institute that would take students beyond the level of the existing Bible schools. This led to the establishment of the Mennonite Brethren Bible College (MBBC) in 1944. By now Unruh was well known in our churches throughout the country and it was only natural that he should be asked to become the college's first president. Unruh found it hard to leave his work in Winkler, where he had taught for nineteen years, and his colleagues there were also loath to see him go. However, he felt God was calling him to a new venture and so the Unruhs moved to Winnipeg.

Because his ability to communicate in English was limited, Unruh stepped back from the leadership of the college after his first year and John B. Toews, who was doing graduate work in theology at the time, was called to be president of the newly founded college. Unruh, however, stayed on as instructor for another ten years, teaching his Bible classes in German. At 74 he retired from a long and fruitful teaching career.

Unruh stood head and shoulders above most of his peers, both figuratively and literally. He was tall and rather corpulent and with his neatly trimmed beard and mustache cut a patriarchal figure. With a seemingly inexhaustible store of energy and with strict work

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habits he not only carried a heavy teaching load but regularly preached in churches on Sundays. He rarely missed an engagement because of ill health. In the matter of dress he was quite fastidious and was rarely seen in public without coat and tie.

Dr. Unruh was a godly man, but not someone who wears a halo around his head. He saw no conflict between godliness and being human and natural. All who knew Unruh recall his gift of humour. At faculty meetings J. B. Toews occasionally suggested that he refrain from humour so that they could complete their agenda. Unruh responded by opining, that he had been doing that all day. On one occasion when he was asked whether he had difficulty in believing the biblical story in which Balaam's ass reportedly spoke, he quipped: "None at all; I have already heard many asses speak in my lifetime." However, his many witty comments and funny stories never gave people the impression that he was flippant or shallow.

In his relationships with other people he was very sensitive. When he thought he had offended someone, he was quick to make it right. One night he called someone on the telephone and received an angry response. He had dialed the wrong number. Next day, having discovered who the offended party was, he asked a friend, H. P. Toews, to go with him to make his apologies to the people he had upset. Reflecting on such incidents reminded me of the words of William Inge, the famous dean of St. Paul's: "It does not seem to me that clever books and brilliant sermons have done so much for me as those chance glimpses into characters far above my own."

I shook Abraham's hand and wished him well at the reception following their diamond wedding anniversary. By then he was suffering from diabetes and his eyesight was very poor. Somehow I sensed that he had not recognized me, but thought nothing of it. A few weeks later he wrote me a letter in faltering handwriting, apologizing that he had not greeted me as warmly as he should have. He wanted to have a good conscience towards God and his fellow brothers and sisters.

The training of their six children was largely Mrs. Unruh's responsibility, since Abraham was almost always engaged in teaching or preaching or in preparation of lectures and sermons. Often he was gone from home for longer periods of time. When at home, the children knew that they must not disturb him in his study. Fortunately he had a wife who knew how to run a household, for Abraham was not very adept at practical matters. Even the task of putting on the storm windows for winter fell to Mrs. Unruh, although he might hold the ladder while she climbed up to the second floor windows. Not all of the Unruh children accepted the Christian faith and that weighed heavily on the hearts of the parents. It was particularly hard for the Unruhs when their youngest son, Victor, who had joined the RCAF, lost his life in World War II.

In the field of theology Unruh was largely a self-taught man. Although he had received a good foundation in several academic disciplines, he had never attended a theological seminary. He read widely to equip himself for his teaching and preaching ministry. He always regretted that he had not had the opportunity to learn Hebrew and Greek and used to quiz his colleagues repeatedly about the meaning of Hebrew and Greek words. Although he had firm convictions on the fundamental doctrines of the Bible, he had an aversion for dogmatism. He was ever the learner.

In his lectures at ministers' conferences Unruh used to warn his fellow ministers against spending their energies in fighting for trivial causes; rather, he suggested, they should give themselves completely to the proclamation of the great truths of the gospel. Also, it was his concern that doctrine should be vitally related to ethics. The story is told that on one occasion, when he traveled in a car with a fellow-believer, they got into a debate as to what should be emphasized more in Christian teaching: doctrine or ethics. Unruh thought it was ethics, but the man at the wheel defended doctrine so vigorously that he failed to watch the road and they landed in the ditch. "That's where you get," said Unruh drily, "with your

doctrine without ethics." He was, one might say, a practical theologian. In recognition of his great gifts and the profound impact his teaching and preaching had made on Mennonite churches both in Canada and the United States, Bethel College, Kansas, awarded him an honorary doctor of divinity degree.

Unruh's classroom lectures often sounded like sermons and his sermons could be described as lectures. He wanted to share information with his audiences, but in such a way that this could be applied to everyday life. He suggested on one occasion that the fulness of the Spirit in the life of a minister could be seen in that he expressed himself clearly and intelligently. Often one could hear him pray: "Lord, give me enough understanding to speak intelligently." With Spurgeon, who was one of his heroes (although he rejected Spurgeon's Calvinism), he believed that people as a rule were eloquent on those subjects which they understood.

Early in life Unruh had discovered one of the secrets of good communication: the organization of one's materials. His sermons as well as his lectures were always clearly structured and outlined. Students sometimes used his outlines to preach their own sermons. Unruh did not mind, adding without false modesty, that it was quite alright for them to make a vest out of his coat. When a former student of his somewhat gleefully reported that he had used one of Unruh's outlines for a sermon, Unruh reminded him that one could use the same dipper to draw water from the surface or from its depths.

Although Unruh took only an outline with him into the pulpit, he always wrote his sermons out in longhand. Careful preparation, he believed, was absolutely essential for a fruitful preaching ministry. Writing out sermons and lectures, he argued, also helped to improve the speaker's grammar. His extensive reading in German and Russian literature gave him a rich source of sermon illustration. But he also had an observant eye and saw illustrations for biblical truths in everyday life as well. Since he was an itinerant

minister, he repeated some of his sermons in different congregations. He made it a rule of thumb however, that when a sermon had lost its fire, it must be thrown into the fire—not literally, of course, for he encouraged ministers to file their manuscript sermons carefully.

Unruh was not only a captivating speaker but also a writer. For years he wrote Sunday school lessons for Mennonite Brethren churches. He also contributed many articles to Mennonite journals. His magnum opus was his *Geschichte der Mennoniten Brüdergemeinde* which he completed during his last year at MBBC. This 850 page volume demanded the collecting of an enormous amount of historical information. Historians later criticized him for not interacting sufficiently with this information. Perhaps he was too kind to be very critical when writing about the church he loved so dearly.

For many years Unruh served on the Board of Reference and Counsel of the Canadian Mennonite Brethren Conference. He also served on the board of Tabor College, which in his earlier years received some of its support from Canadian churches. For a number of years he was moderator of the Canadian Conference, chairing its annual sessions with enthusiasm and humor. At one such conference, when J. J. Thiessen, a well-known minister from Vancouver, repeatedly pressed a particular point, Unruh finally told him: "Brother Thiessen, put your ideas down in writing and send them to the *Zionsbote* (a German Mennonite Brethren publication), and let us get on with the agenda." He could do this in such a playful way that people as a rule did not take offence. As a teenager I attended a Canadian Conference at which B. B. Janz opposed Unruh, the moderator. Fearing he might have offended Unruh, Janz apologized. Unruh then suggested to B. B. Janz that when he would preach the sermon at Unruh's funeral, he should choose the Pauline passage that speaks of the God "who justifies the ungodly."

The Elmwood Mennonite Brethren Church (earlier called

*16 Honor such people*

“Northend”) hosted a three-day Bible conference annually between Christmas and New Year. Beginning in 1927 these conferences were held for a period of fifty years. For twenty-three of these fifty years Unruh was regularly one of the speakers. During the last several years it was my privilege to share with him in these Bible conferences.

In the spring of 1954 Unruh bade farewell to his beloved college. Having taught for sixty years the time had come for him to leave the classroom. From now on he would devote what energy he had to preaching. The Unruhs then moved to Chilliwack, B. C., where their youngest and widowed daughter, Lydia, lived with her two sons. Unruh used to quip: “I began in Winkler and end up *im Winkel* (in a corner).” Mrs. Unruh cared for her husband right up to his death. His diabetes eventually robbed him of his eyesight and she spent many hours reading to him. Besides other physical disabilities that weighed him down in his last years, he was often burdened with the feeling that he had made so many mistakes in life—something not unusual for older saints who have tried to live by high ethical standards. However, he rejoiced in the forgiving grace of God and accepted his trials as God’s refining process.

Unruh had wanted so much to attend the 1960 General Conference in Reedley, California at which the Mennonite Brethren Church celebrated the centennial of its existence, but it was not to be. On December 26, 1960, Unruh preached his last sermon. The topic was, “And we beheld his glory” (John 1:14). Did he have a premonition of the glory of the world to come into which he would shortly enter? He had consented to preach again in Clearbrook on January 6, but as he began his sermon he lapsed into a coma and a few days later, at age 82, he passed into the presence of the Lord.

Isaac Thiessen, pastor of the Chilliwack church, visited him in the hospital and read Psalm 23 for him and prayed. Unruh responded with an audible “Amen.” It was his last word. The funeral took place in the auditorium of the Mennonite Educational

Institute, Clearbrook. A vast crowd of mourners gathered to pay their final respects to one who had meant so much to all of them. Some fifty ministers of the gospel were present. Children and grandchildren had come from far and near. Unfortunately their son Abraham and his family, who were serving in India at the time, could not come.

A male chorus composed of former students and the Columbia Bible Institute choir sang. Conference leaders offered words of condolence and numerous telegrams were read from individuals, churches, schools and publishing houses. The Winkler Bible Institute, the Mennonite Brethren Bible College and the Elmwood Church in Winnipeg, where the Unruhs had been members so long, sent representatives. Former students felt honoured to be pallbearers. Unruh lay in the casket holding his old and well-worn Bible—symbolic of his life-long passion. Dr. F. C. Peters, moderator of the Canadian Conference gave the eulogy stressing that Unruh had been a dear brother, a faithful servant, and a loving co-worker. Isaac Thiessen read the obituary. With the singing of one of Unruh's favorite hymns, "Take Thou My Hands O Father," the service ended. Interment followed at the Little Mountain Cemetery, Chilliwack.



Cornelius and Agnes (Dueck) Wall

## 2

*CORNELIUS WALL (1893-1985)*

Cornelius Wall was the fifth of eight children born to Johann and Maria Wall. The family lived in Blumenort at the time—a Mennonite village in the Molotschna colony in the Ukraine. The parents tried hard to give their sons a good education (girls in those days were expected to become homemakers). Cornelius completed *Zentralschule* at Ohrloff and then went on to take teacher training at Halbstadt. World War I rudely disrupted his plans to teach in one of the Mennonite colonies.

When the war broke out in 1914, Cornelius volunteered for medical service. While he waited for his assignment, he volunteered to serve at the Mennonite psychiatric institution near Einlage. Before the end of the year he was ordered to report to medical service in Kharkov. His medical unit was sent first to the Turkish front, but it was re-directed from there to Poland where the Germans were threatening to break through. For a year he served on the western front, picking up the wounded, both Russian and German, on the battlefield and delivering them by stretcher to hospital trains. To his surprise, in the summer of 1916 his unit was ordered back to the Turkish front where he served until the end of the war.

When the news of the Tsar's abdication spread, Cornelius' unit was sent to the Black Sea port of Batum, and from there to the Georgian city of Tiflis. While serving as secretary in the medical corps headquarters in this city, Cornelius attended night school in the local *Gymnasium* and also earned his teacher's credentials. By the end of 1917 he was permitted to return home and was released from his para-military duties.

The horrors of war was a shattering experience for a young man who had grown up in a sheltered community and who by nature was

extremely sensitive to the sufferings of others. After living in tents for three years, tending to the wounded, Cornelius returned to a country in chaos. After the Bolshevik Revolution, which ended the Tsarist regime, Russia went through a destructive civil war and general anarchy.

Since he was now free from government service, Cornelius applied for a teaching position, hoping finally to begin his life's calling. He had committed his life to Christ before the war and decided to confess his faith publicly by being baptized in the Mennonite Church. He also decided to get married before entering his teaching career. He had fallen in love with Agnes Dueck before the war broke out and they now decided to announce their engagement. As Agnes's parents prepared for the wedding of their daughter, Blumenort was being harassed by Machno bandits. But, in the midst of all this turmoil, Cornelius and Agnes were married on March 1, 1918.

After hostilities between Russia and Germany ceased, the German army moved into the Ukraine. That gave the Mennonite villages, who were friendly to the Germans, a temporary breathing spell. Shortly after their wedding Cornelius accepted a teaching position in the village of Tschongrow, in the Crimea. The young couple loaded their few earthly possessions into a freight car and made their way to the Crimea. To their pleasant surprise, the John Wienses, who had returned from mission work in India, were their neighbors. Because the times were so troubled, the Wienses could not return to India. Mr. Wiens therefore decided to put his gifts and training to good use by opening a Bible school in Tschongraw. He then asked several other teachers to join him in this venture, including A. H. Unruh, whose story was told in the previous chapter.

Wall had secretly hoped to become a missionary eventually, but wanted to get some teaching experience before going to seminary in Hamburg, Germany, to prepare himself. (Since the Mennonites in

Russia did not have a seminary, a number of young men went to seminaries in Germany, Switzerland or Estonia.) After only one year of elementary school teaching Wall enrolled in the new Bible school in his village. However, classes had not yet begun when the government issued a proclamation for a general mobilization. Employed teachers were to be exempted and so the Walls conveniently found an elementary school in Baschlitscha, in the Crimea, for the 1919-20 school year. Before they made their move to this village, their first daughter, Mary, was born on March 9, 1919.

Meanwhile, the Bolsheviks continued their evil work of pillaging, raping and killing in the Mennonite colonies of the Ukraine, as well as in the Crimea. Back in Blumenort, Cornelius's father and brother were brutally murdered by bandits and the family home was destroyed. Cornelius and Agnes then took several family members into their crowded quarters in the Crimea.

During this second year of teaching Cornelius was asked by the Mennonite villagers also to serve them as minister of the gospel. This marked the beginning of a lifelong calling: to teach and to preach—a calling Cornelius never regretted.

By 1920 the threat of being drafted had passed and the Walls moved back to Tschongrow to attend Bible school. The political situation, however, deteriorated and one day Red soldiers surrounded the Bible school and arrested the entire student body and their teachers. Had it not been for the intercession by Russian neighbors all of them may have been shot. Clearly the Communist regime was not going to tolerate Bible schools in the long run.

It was during their years at the Bible school that the Walls began to feel uneasy about the spiritual state of the Mennonite Church to which they belonged. Although it was a painful decision, they were re-baptized and joined the Mennonite Brethren Church, which was founded in 1860 as the result of a renewal movement. Wall remained loyal to this church all his life, although it too had

weaknesses which he often deplored. However, his heart was always wide enough to embrace believers from other traditions and he had vowed never to discredit his first baptism, when as a young man he had joined the Mennonite Church.

Cornelius's older brother Henry left for Germany in 1914 and then emigrated to Canada. As the future in the Soviet Union grew progressively darker, Cornelius and Agnes decided to seek a new homeland as well. With the political situation in the Crimea still very unsettled, they chose to leave Russia by the back door. In 1922, a few months after their son Arthur was born, they made their way to Batum on the Black Sea, suffering incredible hardships on the way. In Batum other Mennonites joined them in the hope of getting out of Russia. They took refuge in warehouses by the waterfront in the hope of escaping by ship to Constantinople. Since food was scarce many refugees suffered from malnutrition, including the infant son of the Walls. Little Arthur died of hunger and they buried him on a hillside.

One day an American steamer docked in Batum, carrying mail from America. There was a letter for the Walls from their brother Henry in Canada who guaranteed them the money for passage to America. They were able to board a liner that took them to Istanbul (called Constantinople until 1923), eluding the Red guards in Batum in a miraculous way. After months of anxious waiting in Istanbul the American embassy was able to clear their way to emigrate to the United States. In November, 1922, they boarded the French freighter, Braga, which docked at numerous ports before passing through the Straights of Gibraltar. For 22 days they endured the miserable conditions on this freighter. Mary cried so much that the captain scolded the parents for not taking proper care of her. When they explained that she was crying because of hunger the captain made sure she got a plate of food every day. The kitchen staff saved leftovers for the Walls. Finally they arrived on Ellis Island, New York.

After spending ten days on Ellis Island, where new immigrants were processed, they took a train to Hillsboro, Kansas, where relatives received them warmly. Shortly after arriving in America, on January 14, 1924, their second daughter Agnes was born.

The Walls savored and enjoyed the freedoms of America and the kindness of friends and relatives. But soon they had to face the stark reality of making a living in this new land, learning a new language and paying back their travel debt. They accepted every opportunity to earn a few dollars while Cornelius struggled through Tabor Academy. His goal was to enroll in Tabor College and become a teacher. (His teaching credentials from Russia were not accepted in America). After several years of hard studies and living in extreme poverty, Cornelius graduated from Tabor College with his B. A. degree.

In 1927 Cornelius was offered a teaching position at the Zoar Academy in Inman, Kansas and so the family settled there. Several summers were spent in Chicago earning some extra dollars and improving their English. With the collapse of the stock market in 1929 and the beginning of the Depression, the Zoar school board could no longer pay their teachers a salary; they had to manage with the meat, flour, potatoes and vegetables given to them by farmer friends.

After three years at the Zoar Academy, Cornelius was offered a position as instructor of Bible and German at Hesston College. In view of the family's desperate financial needs, he accepted the challenge. The Walls enjoyed this rather more conservative community of Old Mennonites (although they were not allowed to participate in the Lord's Supper). The people of Hesston did not speak German, as did so many in Hillsboro and Inman, and this helped the Walls to improve their English.

Because of the Depression the treasury of Hesston College also ran dry and the faculty was reduced from thirteen to five. Cornelius understood the dilemma of the board (he was no longer receiving

his salary), and so, after two enjoyable years at Hesston, volunteered to leave. The Zoar Academy called them back, but offered no salary. Students paid a small tuition fee and the farmers kept bringing the family meat, flour and vegetables. So the Walls survived. Repeatedly churches began to call on Cornelius to preach the Word and when the Henderson, Nebraska, Mennonite Brethren Church invited him to be their minister, the Walls decided to accept this call as God's leading.

What they did not know was that the Henderson community was divided. The country church, where he was to serve, was at odds with the city church. Cornelius found himself cast into the role of peace-maker—something he was exceptionally good at. While serving in Henderson, a graduate of Moody Bible Institute established a small Bible school in Henderson and asked Cornelius to help him with the teaching of the young people in the community. Again he found himself in the dual role of teacher and preacher.

The Depression continued unabated. Suddenly an invitation came from Canada where Wall's former Tschongrow teachers (Unruh, Wiens and Reimer) had established the Winkler Bible School, in Manitoba. The opportunity to join his former teachers in a Bible teaching ministry in Canada at first seemed very attractive. However, after weighing all the pro's and con's, the Walls did not have the inner assurance that this was God's way for them at this time.

After three years in Henderson an opportunity to teach in a Bible school in Mountain Lake, Minnesota, presented itself. The Walls responded positively and in 1936 they moved to Minnesota. Shortly before they left Nebraska Mrs. Wall had to undergo major surgery which brought her to the very brink of death. Although it took her a long time to recover, God spared her life. When the family finally did arrive in Mountain Lake they discovered a serious lack of housing. With a meager salary of 75 dollars a month they could hardly dare to assume a mortgage. But in spite of these and

other difficulties the nine years spent in Mountain Lake were an enjoyable period in Cornelius's teaching career.

For a long time he had dreamt of attending a theological seminary, but finances would not permit this. In the summer, prior to settling in Mountain Lake, they lived in a tent on the grounds of Winona Lake School of Theology. Dr. Gehman of Princeton Theological Seminary and Dr. Kuist, later also of Princeton, lectured at this summer school. Cornelius enjoyed his studies under these competent professors. These men took an interest in the family and encouraged Cornelius to come to Princeton for graduate work—a hope that was to become a reality in due time.

After earning a master's degree in Religious Education at Winona Lake, 1943, Wall applied for admission to Princeton. Because his Tabor College B.A. was not accredited at that time, he could not be admitted as a regular student. Meantime Cornelius took a summer session at Northern Baptist Seminary in Chicago, but did not find the atmosphere congenial to his taste. To his pleasant surprise, a letter from Dr. John Macay, president of Princeton, arrived one day offering Cornelius a one-year scholarship. It was expected, however, that he would come without family and live in student quarters.

The Walls decided then that Mrs. Wall and her daughter, Agnes, would stay in Mountain Lake (Mary had married Ben Wiens in 1942) and Cornelius would spend a year at Princeton. Although he was registered as a "special" student, he decided to fulfill all the course requirements. It turned out to be a profitable year and at the end of the academic session his professors encouraged him to continue. Cornelius, however, had promised to teach at least one more year in Mountain Lake and felt he must honour his commitment to the Bible school. At the end of the 1945-46 school year, the Walls left Minnesota for Princeton, New Jersey (their daughter Agnes had meantime also married).

While Cornelius studied, Mrs. Wall took on a variety of

household jobs to support him. For two years they lived on the proverbial shoestring while Cornelius completed the requirements of a Bachelor of Divinity degree. Princeton, however, was still hesitant to grant him the degree because of his unaccredited B. A. But Dr. Gehman, professor of Old Testament, encouraged him to push ahead and complete the work for the Master of Theology degree and so the Walls decided to stay on for another year.

During that year, Cornelius received several invitations to return to Bible teaching. One such invitation came from Fresno, where Dr. G. W. Peters was establishing Pacific Bible Institute; another came from South America. Although the Walls took these invitations seriously, they were hesitant to make any decisions until Cornelius had completed his course of studies. In 1948, after he had completed all his work for his Master of Theology degree, he received a pleasant surprise. The Registrar called him in one day and informed him that he would be the first student in Princeton's history to receive both the Bachelor of Divinity and the Master of Theology degree at the same convocation in spring.

Upon the urgent request of Dr. Harold Bender, dean of the Goshen Biblical Seminary, the Walls decided to go to Europe under the auspices of the Mennonite Central Committee to work among the many refugees who had streamed into the West after the collapse of Germany at the end of World War II. Several of their Princeton friends thought they were too old for such a venture, but Cornelius and Agnes rose to the challenge and in 1948 they were on their way to New York. Daughter Mary with her husband Ben Wiens were at the pier in New York to bid their parents farewell. In some respects this was to be the most meaningful chapter in the life of the Walls. Both of them had the gift of entering into people's needs, and what awaited them on the other side of the Atlantic would tax this gift to the limit. Traumatized by long years of Communist oppression and by the horrors of the war that had just ended, thousands of homeless and hopeless people from the East-

block needed someone to give them courage to keep on living and to make a fresh start in life.

On their way to Basel, Switzerland, the Walls witnessed the terrible devastation of Germany by the war. Dr. Harold Bender was at the MCC center in Basel to welcome them. After purchasing an old Volkswagen, they began their spiritual ministry in the refugee camps in Germany. Cornelius and Agnes gave themselves completely to listening, counseling and teaching. Much of their time was spent in refugee camps in Gronau, near the Dutch border, and at Bachnang. The administration of Gronau was in the hands of Siegfried Janzen from Canada. The Walls devoted all their time to the spiritual needs of the refugees from the Soviet Union who had for years been without Christian teaching. Under the biblical instruction of Cornelius many of them were confronted with the claims of Christ and embraced the Christian faith. As a result there were many baptisms in these camps, as people publicly confessed their new faith in the Savior.

Most of the refugees secretly feared they would be repatriated to the Soviet Union and were very anxious to leave Europe for Canada or, if need be, to South America. What made the internal sufferings of so many women in the camps so acute was the fact that they had no idea where their husbands were. There were also husbands who had escaped to Germany who did not know where their wives or children were.

To breathe hope into these broken hearts and lives was a profoundly satisfying ministry for the Walls, even though it often brought them to the point of total exhaustion. The friendships established with people in the camps and in the Mennonite churches of Germany, Holland, France and Switzerland continued to brighten the lives of Cornelius and Agnes in old age. Most of the refugees eventually were able to emigrate, although for those who went to the Paraguayan Chaco the prospects of a good life were rather disheartening.

Not all refugees from the East reached the camps set up for them. Many were scattered all over Germany. These too needed to be visited. Travel was difficult in those post-war years when Germany lay in ruins and grocery stores were almost empty. But invitations to speak in churches, at youth retreats and at Bible conferences continued to pour in. That meant spending a great deal of time on the road in arduous travel.

The defeat of Germany and the revelations of the atrocities committed by the Nazi regime had knocked the foundations from under the feet of many German young people and they longed to hear a trustworthy word from God. A grey-haired man, who knew what he was talking about, was highly regarded by the German youth. Cornelius proved to be the right person for that day. Often it was not so much what he said that impressed them, but the model Christian life of Mr. and Mrs. Wall that drew young people to Christ.

The Walls had agreed to serve the refugees initially for two years. In 1950 they sailed for New York from where they took the train to Mountain Lake. Meantime Cornelius received a call from the Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg, Manitoba, to join the faculty for the 1950-51 college year. As it turned out, the Walls stayed longer than that one year. It was during this time that I met Cornelius for the first time when he came to Coaldale to expound the Prophets at a ministers course.

During the second year at the college Dr. Bender came to Winnipeg and once again pleaded with the Walls to return to Europe and to continue the good work they had begun. Cornelius F. Klassen, who was also working with the refugees at the time, put extra pressure on the Walls encouraging them strongly to come to Europe once more. And so at the end of the fall semester, 1952, they were on their way back to Europe.

The question had been asked repeatedly, even during their first term in Europe, whether the Mennonites should not join together

and establish a Bible school for the training of their young people in the Christian faith. Cornelius had been very much in favor of such a venture from the beginning and now, with the help of the Mennonite Central Committee and some European church leaders, a school was established in Switzerland, located eventually at the Bienenberg, near Liestal.

Although a Swiss teacher and preacher, Samuel Gerber, was to become the principal, Cornelius and Agnes were the guiding lights of the school for some seven years. Today students all over Europe and other lands bless the Walls for their devoted service during those years.

In 1958, after a total of nine years of service in post-war Europe, they returned to Hillsboro, Kansas, where they planned to retire. Cornelius was now 65 years of age and both he and Agnes deserved a well-earned rest. But even before they reached Hillsboro they received a call from Winnipeg asking them to return to teach at MBBC. By the time the second semester began the Walls were back in Winnipeg.

I had joined the faculty of the college in 1953 and when the Walls came to Winnipeg they settled in a house across the street from us. We fell in love almost immediately with this godly professor and his dear wife. Cornelius was not the most fascinating lecturer but he offered the students a substantial diet in the classroom. His influence on students outside the classroom was perhaps as great as in the lecture hall. His Christian lifestyle attracted both young and old.

Cornelius not only taught biblical subjects at MBBC but carried on a demanding counseling ministry in the city where hundreds of European refugees had settled. Also, he carried on a heavy correspondence with people in Europe who kept on looking to him for spiritual guidance. I saw him post handfuls of letters to Europe in the post office on his way to school. The Walls continued to care deeply about the spiritual welfare of recent immigrants from Europe.

For example, Cornelius parked his car in the garage of one such family. He had to take the city bus to get to his car, but it provided him with the opportunity to look in and see how these recent immigrants were getting along.

Cornelius had been hired at MBBC with the understanding that he would continue to teach until a permanent replacement could be found. That did not occur until the end of the 1962 academic year. The Walls were now prepared to leave for their home in Hillsboro, but Mrs. Wall had just fallen ill and was too weak to travel. Since their departure was delayed, the Manitoba Home Missions board asked Cornelius to serve as hospital chaplain for a year. As it turned out, this was to be a very rewarding experience for both the chaplain and the patients. Before the year ended Samuel Gerber, now principal of the European Bible School in Switzerland, urgently begged the Walls to return to the Bienenberg and to help him with teaching the young people who were enrolling in the school.

Mrs. Wall was not strong enough to go to Europe. Therefore it was decided that she would stay with their children., Ben and Mary Wiens in Trenton, New Jersey and Cornelius would go to Europe alone for a three-month assignment. (Altogether Cornelius crossed the Atlantic nine times for ministries in Europe.) Swiss, German and French students attended the Bienenberg in increasing numbers and today graduates from this school can be found all over the world, serving the Lord. It was my privilege to teach for shorter or longer periods at this school. On several occasions Cornelius was at the Bienenberg when we came there—always an extra bonus. When Cornelius returned to America, he and Agnes settled in Hillsboro and made arrangements for their retirement years. They had both reached the age of seventy and needed a rest after an extremely eventful, busy and often times stressful life in the service of others. With no heavy assignments hanging over their heads they enjoyed their newly found leisure immensely. Mrs. Wall, however, continued to suffer from asthma, glaucoma and other disabilities.

Suddenly and unexpectedly there came a call from the Central Mennonite Brethren Church, asking the Walls to come to Winnipeg again. The church's pastor had recently died and they needed an interim minister until they could find a permanent replacement. Their age and Mrs. Wall's health spoke against such a venture. However, after much prayer, they accepted the call and by April, 1966, they were on their way to Canada again. They moved into an apartment close to where we lived and for us as a family it was a pleasure to have them nearby once more. They had accepted the call with the clear understanding that they would stay only until a new pastor could be found. After serving the church as leader and teacher for about six months the church found a pastor and the Walls felt free to return to Kansas. Unfortunately in their absence the water pipes in their vacant Hillsboro house had frozen and broken and the Walls returned to a rather messy situation.

While visiting their children in New Jersey the doctor urged Mrs. Wall to have a cataract operation. This resulted in a six-month absence from their home. During these months of waiting, in July 1968, they celebrated their golden wedding anniversary. Once they were back home they had an "open house" for their many Hillsboro friends. After fifty years of life together, unwavering in their love and devotion to each other, Cornelius and Agnes wanted to give glory to God for his grace and goodness in their lives.

Shortly after this joyful event an increasing number of trials came their way. Cornelius had to have surgery and then, while visiting their children (the Kliewers) in Nashville, he had a heart attack. Although Cornelius recovered and enjoyed reasonably good health again, Mrs. Wall's health deteriorated. In the spring of 1973 she was hospitalized and never returned home again. On April 13, with her husband at her bedside, she passed peacefully into the presence of the Lord. Cornelius took off her wedding ring and slipped it on his finger. He wore it as a loving symbol of their friendship through fifty-five years of marriage. Although he felt the

pain of separation acutely, the memories of their life together were a source of great comfort to him.

Cornelius now faced the future alone. To his surprise Samuel Gerber, principal of the Bible school at the Bienenberg, invited him to come to Switzerland to conduct Bible studies and to visit former students. Ben and Mary Wiens went with him and celebrated his eightieth birthday at the Bienenberg. After six wonderful months, granddaughter Sandra Wiens escorted him home to Hillsboro. He became a familiar figure in Hillsboro, riding his bicycle or walking jauntily with his walking stick in his hand and his French beret on his head. But old age was beginning to take its toll. Ben and Mary Wiens, who were teaching in Pennsylvania, decided then to buy their parents' house in Hillsboro and make it their future retirement home. Their father, however, was to remain in the house as long as he could.

In 1984 Cornelius suffered a second stroke and had to be hospitalized. He realized now that he would need ongoing medical care and so he entered Parkside Nursing Home. He worked hard at his therapy and longed to be back in his study. He missed his routine Bible study, his typewriter, and the trees which he had planted in his back yard. By now Ben and Mary had moved to Hillsboro and they took him home on numerous occasions. However, his days were numbered and he waited for the Lord to take him home. Mary visited him at the Home one Sunday morning and found him semi-conscious, with his hands raised to heaven as if waiting for the angels to come and carry him home. His eyes were open, but he seemed to focus on something he could not yet see. His arms dropped and he was gone.

A CAT scan taken earlier had shown that he was suffering from cancer and, since there was nothing the physicians could do about it, he had asked that he not be put on life-support systems. He wanted to die when his time came. He passed away on November 17, 1985 and was laid to rest in the Hillsboro cemetery beside his

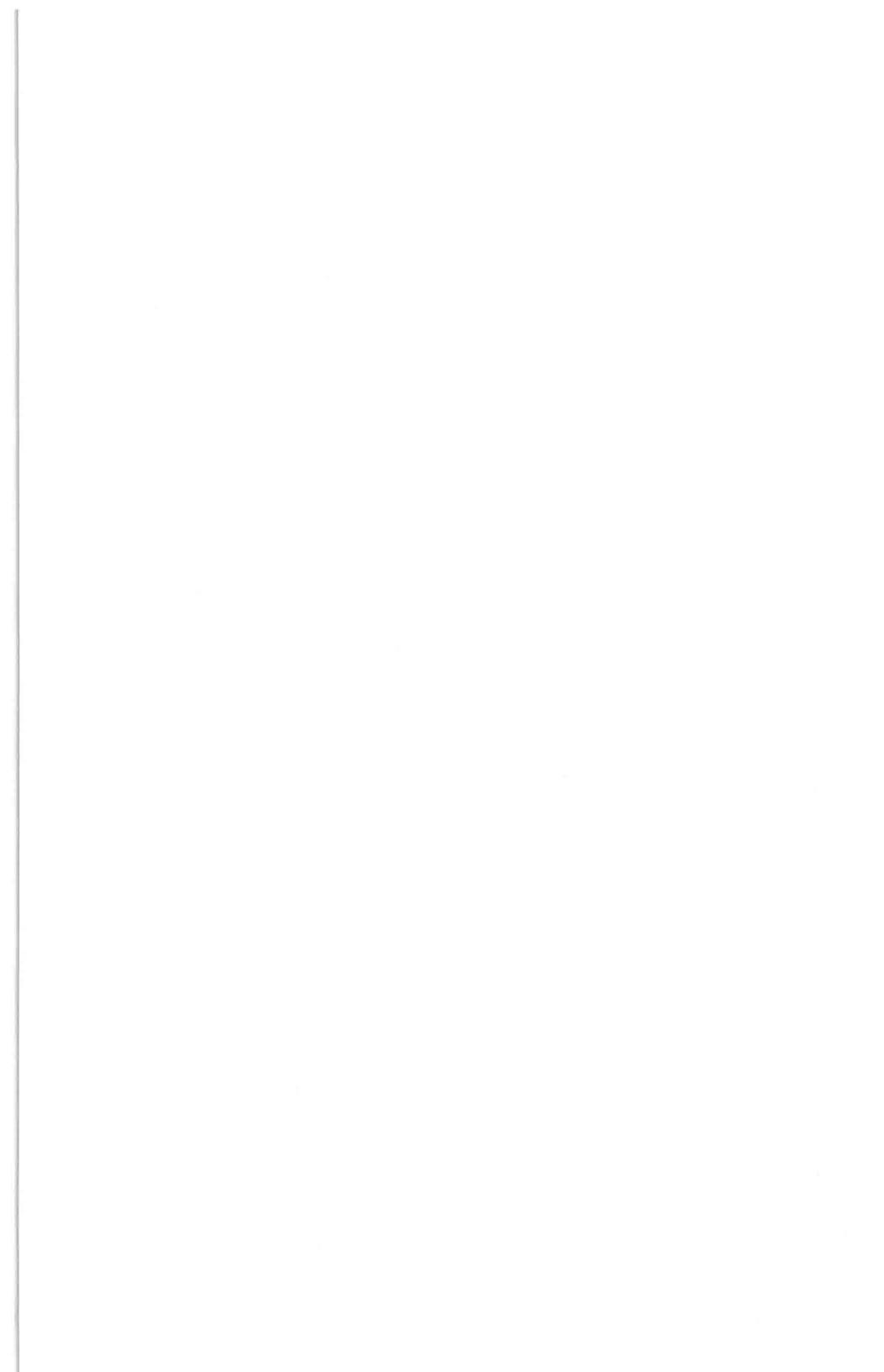
beloved wife Agnes. He was ninety-two. Archie and Agnes Kliewer had come from Nashville; Ben, who was in Paraguay at the time, took the next flight home in order to be at the funeral. Besides their children Cornelius left to mourn five grandchildren, six great grandchildren, and a host of friends. The family expressed their feelings about their father's life in the words of the hymn, "Servant of God, Well Done":

"Now toil and conflict o'er,  
go take with saints thy place;  
but go as each has gone before  
a sinner saved by grace.  
Soldier of Christ, well done!  
Praise be thy new employ;  
and while eternal ages run,  
rest in they Savior's joy."

After Mrs. Wall passed away Cornelius had decided to write his memoirs which were published in 1979 under the title: "As We Remember". I felt greatly honored when he asked me to write the foreword to this volume. The life of Cornelius Wall speaks for itself. If greatness is measured in terms of nobility of character, then he was truly a great man of God. He had a tender conscience and was always concerned that he be at peace with God and with people. Although he was a Mennonite Brethren by conviction and choice he was always big enough to reach out to people of other traditions. Human need was for him always a call for service and help. The following lines from a booklet he wrote (*Principles We Lived By*) sum up succinctly the vision and goals of his and Agnes life: "We agreed early in life on an overriding motive to govern us, in order to run our course without wavering. This aim was to prove that Christianity works and that Christian principles are valid and must be adhered to under all circumstances."

The material things of life held no great attraction for Cornelius. When his family lost everything in the Bolshevik Revolution, Cornelius made a vow never to possess so much of this world's

goods that parting with them would be hard. Although he had firm convictions about the fundamental teachings of the Scriptures, he was always open to new insights. Whenever we met he had questions about some biblical text on which he been reflecting. Also, his interest in the life of the church never slackened, even when he could no longer serve the church as he had done for most of his life. One avenue of service, besides prayer, that remained open to him almost to the end of his life was that of correspondence with people who needed counsel and spiritual help. Cornelius was a humble and self-effacing man. He recognized his own limitations and did not try to be something he could not be. His piety was not the plastic, artificial kind, which people find repulsive. Rather, he was completely human and natural. Young and old felt attracted to him—even college students who in the late sixties tended to rebel against many church practices. He was a wonderful companion on a fishing trip or on an outing in God's great out-of-doors. He loved his flowers and the trees he had planted. And yet one always had the impression that although he could enjoy the earthly gifts of God, his life was anchored in another world. And today, like Abel of old, although he is dead, he continues to speak to us.





Henry H. and Tina (Katharina Andres) Janzen

## 3

*Henry H. Janzen (1901-1975)*

The forebears of Henry Janzen emigrated to the Ukraine from Prussia in 1788. His father and mother were both born in the Molotschna colony, the second colony established by Mennonite immigrants during the reign of Tsar Alexander I.

Henry's father, Heinrich, was a public school teacher in the village of Waldheim. Here he learned to know Gertrude Rabsch whom he later married. In 1900 Heinrich and Gertrude moved to Muensterberg—a lovely village in the Molotschna. For fifteen years Heinrich continued to teach school in this village. He enjoyed teaching and set high standards for his students both in learning and in conduct. Discipline was strict and misdemeanors were duly rewarded with the rather liberal use of the rod, as was generally the practice in European schools at that time.

A year after Heinrich and Gertrude moved to Muensterberg their son Henry was born. Henry was a disappointingly weak child and for several years his parents often wondered whether he would make it into his teens. But when he was about seven his health improved remarkably and he became a strong young man, full of vim and vigor.

Before Henry reached school age he would often sit in his father's classroom and observe him as he instructed his students in the various subjects. That helped him to get a head start and it made him familiar with school routine. At age seven he formally entered grade one. There were about sixty students in seven grades in one classroom. Father taught all the subjects and all the grades. Although Henry learned much from his father, he did not always appreciate the fact that his father was also his teacher. If he ever got into trouble at school he knew that his punishment would be more severe, for father made sure that no student in his class should

accuse him of favouring his son.

Father was a highly respected member of the Mennonite Church, but he did not speak freely to his children about his personal faith. He had a high regard for the Bible, one of the subjects taught in the curriculum, but he was more concerned that his students become familiar with the contents of the Scriptures than about their personal relationship with Jesus Christ. High points in the school year were the Christian festivals, Christmas and Easter when the school invited the public to its well-prepared programs. The closing exercises of the school year also were a great attraction for the parents. It gave them a taste of what their children had learned in school that year.

In 1914 Henry completed public school and as a teacher's son it was only natural that he should proceed to *Zentralschule*. For this three-year course of studies he went to Ohrloff, an educational center in the Molotschna about ten kilometers from his home village. Ohrloff had a bookstore, a hospital, a pharmacy and a school for the deaf. It even had running water and electric lights.

World War I broke out about the same time that Henry began attending *Zentralschule*. His father resigned from his teaching job and left home in order to serve in the medical corps for the duration of the war. As a result mother and the three children (Henry was the eldest) had to vacate the teacherage. Father's salary was cut off and the family faced considerable hardship during the war years.

Henry, however, continued his schooling at Ohrloff.. He boarded in private homes and often came home on weekends. Away from his father's watchful eye the fourteen-year old revelled in his new-found freedoms, although even in high school the teachers put restrictions on the students. Henry got involved in many boyish pranks. He also took up smoking to prove his maturity—a habit which he broke with decisively when he became a Christian. Freshmen were subject to a lot of hazing at Ohrloff and Henry had to endure his share. His only comfort was returning the favor in the following year.

His academic accomplishments in his first year at Ohrloff were nothing to write home about, but at least he passed his subjects. The next two years showed a marked improvement in his school work and so he was able to complete *Zentralschule* in the allotted three-year period.

Henry had some outstanding teachers during these years; several of them were university trained. His fluency in Russian, which later opened so many doors for ministry to him, must be attributed largely to the courses in Russian offered by Mr. Braeul. Religion classes were part of the high school curriculum as well and the students acquired a good knowledge of the contents of the Scriptures. Church attendance was required of all students, but Henry was careful not to attend the neighboring Mennonite Brethren Church where preachers put a strong emphasis on conversion, the new birth and a personal commitment to Christ and his kingdom. He was not yet ready to make a decision to be a follower of Christ.

Just when Henry completed *Zentralschule* the Tsar abdicated and a new regime emerged. At first the high school students rejoiced at the prospect of greater political freedom only to be disappointed when revolution and civil war left the country devastated and in turmoil. By 1921 the Janzen family with thousands of others faced the grim spectre of famine and starvation.

Henry came back to his home village of Muensterberg after completing his training in Ohrloff.. His father also returned in 1917 to take up his calling as teacher once again. That allowed the family to move back into the teacherage . Henry had set his mind on *Kommerzschule* (business college), but finances forbade that. However, several university trained people lived in his home village and they were willing to offer tuition in the required subjects. Eight people enrolled in classes and wrote their final exams in Halbstadt, the educational center of the Molotschna colony.

In 1918 the family left Muensterberg and moved to Mariawohl.

This hit Henry rather hard, because it meant severing the ties that bound him to his many friends in his native village. Fortunately, being a rather outgoing person, he found new friends very soon after the family had settled in Marienwohl. He was also able to continue his studies by private tuition.

Many villages in the Molotschna colony had been harassed by bandits after government authority broke down in 1917. But in 1918 the German army occupied the Ukraine and restored order temporarily. However, once the German troops were withdrawn, the turmoil resumed and it was not until 1921 that the Communist government was in firm control. But then came the famine and many Mennonites died of starvation. This famine became the occasion for the birth of the Mennonite Central Committee in the United States—a relief organization that has helped thousands of needy of people for almost a century.

While living in Mariawohl and continuing his studies Henry learned to know Katharina (Tina) Andres, daughter of a progressive farmer. After elementary school Tina had attended the girls' school in Gnadenfeld, about ten kilometers away from her village. For weekends she usually came home to be with family and the village young people. She and Henry felt drawn to each other almost from the day the Janzen family moved into Mariawohl. A few years later they were to marry.

Henry meantime completed about four years of the program of studies offered at the *Kommerzschule*—all by private instruction. He wrote his final exams in Halbstadt and passed. What now? The future looked rather bleak for by now the Communist government had gained control of the country and the new regime began to show its anti-Christian face. Henry was appointed secretary of the village council and shortly after was drafted to be secretary of the regional council of Tokmak. Economically the Ukraine seemed ruined. Henry's clothing had become threadbare; barley bread hardly satisfied Henry's hunger; the office in which Henry worked

was unheated for lack of fuel. In 1922 he was released from his onerous duties as secretary.

Shortly after his return home the call came to register with the army. Henry with two other young men from the village reported at the recruiting office and were sent to a city east of the Sea of Azov where they were to serve as prison guards. When they refused to carry arms on guard duty they were sent farther east into the Caucasus mountains. The train took them past a Mennonite settlement and so they secretly agreed that they would escape. They were able to get off the train undetected and made their way to Mennonite people. It was harvest season and so Henry and his friends helped the villagers bring in the harvest and earned enough money to buy tickets to go home.

Only a day after they returned home the police was on their heels and again Henry decided to escape. He was not yet a Christian, and while in hiding, bribed a Communist official by offering him a cow if he would forge the needed documents declaring him medically unfit for the army. The official was happy to oblige and with these papers in hand Henry came out of hiding. In August 1923 he married Tina Andres.

The wedding was hurried on in part by the fact that Henry's parents were planning to emigrate to Canada and Henry wanted to take his bride with him. Tina's father, however, being a great optimist hoped for better times and decided to remain in the Soviet Union. Tina now had to decide between staying with her family or marrying Henry Janzen and emigrating to Canada. It was not an easy decision to make, but her love for Henry won out in the end.

Clothing was hard to come by in the early twenties and so Tina wore a hand-me-down wedding dress and Henry borrowed a tuxedo. The wedding was to be in the Andres' machine shed. Just as the minister was about to pronounce them husband and wife a rider came galloping onto the yard and told them that under the new regime it was illegal to get married on a farmyard. The minister,

together with the young couple and some family members, drove to a church in a nearby village and the ceremony was duly completed. When they returned the wedding guests were already seated at tables ready to enjoy the wedding meal.

Revival fires began to burn in some of the Mennonite villages during these troublesome times and shortly before the young couple left for Canada Henry embraced the gospel and gave his life over to Jesus Christ. Tina had been converted to Christ when she was at the girls' school in Gnadenfeld.

They had hoped to leave for Canada in 1923 but the documents were slow in coming. They waited for two more years. During these first two years of marriage they lived with Tina's parents—something not all that unusual in Mennonite villages at that time. Henry helped his father-in-law with the farmwork. A year after they were married their first child was born, but it died within a month. In August, 1925, a second son was born. They gave him the name Rudy—the name of their first-born whom they had lost.

Shortly after the birth of Rudy they received permission to leave for Canada. They traveled together with Henry's parents. From Moscow they crossed to Latvia. In the port city of Riga they boarded the S. S. Smolensk which took them as far as England. Because Henry had infected eyes the family was delayed in Southampton for three weeks. On November 6 they began the long voyage across the stormy Atlantic on the S. S. Minnedosa. After landing in Quebec they immediately took the train to Kitchener, Ontario.

For several weeks Henry and his family lived with a farmer working for board and room. Just before Christmas, 1925, Henry and Tina with their infant son moved into town. Every day Henry went to look for work. Finally he got a job in a mattress factory, where he worked from eight to five for eight long years. Working with mattresses was a dusty job and often he had to wear a mask. He took his lunch with him and during the noon break he ate and

then studied his Bible.

Since there was no thought of attending a school of theology Henry decided to teach himself as best he could. Jacob W. Reimer, known for his interpretation of the Revelation in the tradition of John Darby, was expounding the last book of the Bible in Kitchener and Henry drank it all in. Later when Henry was asked to write the article on Mennonite Brethren eschatology for the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, he wrote in the tradition of Darby. When asked how he could do this he replied that it had been his hope that all Mennonite Brethren would believe Darby's teachings. In fact he found it troublesome later when younger scholars rejected Dispensationalism.

In the summer of 1926 Henry, who had become a member of the Mennonite Church while still in Russia, decided to be re-baptized by immersion and join the Kitchener Mennonite Brethren Church. Also, that summer their first daughter was born. When the family was complete there were four sons and three daughters.

Not long after their arrival in Kitchener Henry was called upon to conduct Bible studies in the Kitchener area. Such services were done gratis in those days; however, sometimes farmers in the community would share some of their produce with the Janzens. Occasionally Henry would also receive a small honorarium for his services. The wages at the factory were low and the growing family had to be very frugal in its spending in order to make ends meet. Tina helped by sewing most of the clothes for the children and for herself, often remaking secondhand clothing.

In 1927 Henry, with fear and trembling, preached his first sermon in the Kitchener Mennonite Brethren Church. His gifts were quickly recognized and soon he received invitations from churches in Leamington, Port Rowan, Vineland and St. Catharines. Often he sat late into the night preparing his sermons. He put forth a great effort to learn English. He spoke German and Russian fluently but, given his age when he began learning English, it never flowed as

smoothly as did the other languages.

These were hard but happy years for the family. They had their daily bread, enjoyed good health, cherished the freedom Canada offered its citizens and had a meaningful ministry in the church. As time went on more and more demands were put on Henry to serve in Sunday school, Bible studies and preaching. He tried his best to meet these challenges even though his work at the factory did not allow him as much spare time as he would have liked.

In 1929 the Kitchener Mennonite Brethren Church had come to the conviction that Henry had both the gift and the calling to be an effective preacher and teacher of the Scriptures and offered to ordain him to the gospel ministry. Henry and Tina responded positively to the church's request and publicly committed themselves to a life of service in the church. A year later Henry was chosen to lead the Kitchener church as senior pastor. He continued to work in the mattress factory since it was still a general practice in the Mennonite Brethren Church that ministers served without remuneration. However, the Kitchener church began to supplement Henry's income from the factory by giving him seventy dollars a month. In 1932, when the Ontario Mennonite Brethren Conference was organized, Henry was asked to become the moderator.

To begin with the Ontario conference received believers who were baptized either by immersion or sprinkling upon confession of their faith in Christ. Tina who like Henry had become a member of the Mennonite Church in Russia, had not been immersed. In 1933 she decided to follow the example of her husband and be re-baptized. It was Henry's pleasant duty to baptize his dear wife. When the Ontario Mennonite Brethren Conference applied for membership in the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Church of North America, the Ontario conference had to agree that in the future they would admit only such members who were baptized by immersion. This caused considerable pain in the ranks of some of the Ontario churches, but they agreed to fall in line with

the other Mennonite Brethren churches. No one at the time could look ahead far enough and see the day when the Mennonite Brethren of North America would reverse that decision and recognize other forms of believers' baptism also.

By 1934 the demands on Henry's time were becoming excessive. The daily round at the factory, the pastoral visits, Bible studies and sermons were beginning to take their toll on him. And so he decided to terminate his work at the factory and devote himself completely to the ministry of the gospel even though that meant forfeiting a regular paycheck.

When it became known more widely that Janzen spoke Russian fluently, his services in Russian-speaking churches were soon in great demand. This meant traveling to points all over the USA and Canada where small congregations of believers from Russia were found. Henry also took a great interest in foreign missions. For nine years he was the chairman of the Africa Mission Society and frequently traveled to Winnipeg for the executive meetings. He carried on a long correspondence with missionary Cornelius Unruh in India and encouraged him to retire in Kitchener. When he finally came to Kitchener, Unruh conducted revival meetings and in 1941 the four eldest children of the Janzens accepted the Lord as their Savior and were later baptized upon their confession of faith.

Dr. Oswald Smith of the famous People's Church in Toronto and Peter Deyneka of the Slavic Gospel Association got to know of Janzen's ability to minister in the Russian language and invited him to become the leader of the Russian Bible Institute which held its classes in the People's Church. Janzen accepted this challenge and for four years he took the train for Toronto at six a.m. on Monday morning, taught all week at the Bible Institute, and returned Friday night at eight p.m. Since this made his work as leader of the Kitchener Mennonite Brethren Church next to impossible he asked to be relieved of this responsibility. By accepting the position in Toronto the family also had regular income.

Although Henry now had a meaningful spiritual ministry, it was not an arrangement conducive to good family life. From 1942-46 he was rarely at home during the week. On weekends when he was at home he frequently went out to preach. During the summer months when the school in Toronto was closed he often traveled to distant places, ministering to Russian churches. On one occasion when he was gone for six weeks in Alberta, Tina had to undergo a gallbladder operation. Henry arrived home only after it was all over.

After twenty years in Kitchener the Janzen family faced a relocation. The Canadian Mennonite Brethren Conference had established a college in Winnipeg in 1944. Dr. A. H. Unruh gave initial leadership and then Dr. J. B. Toews was called from the USA to lead the fledgling school. Unruh happened to preach in Kitchener on one occasion and persuaded Janzen to come to Winnipeg and to help in the training of young men and women for service in church, school and missions.

This was a hard decision for the family to make for by now their roots in Kitchener were rather deep. However, they accepted the challenge and in 1946 prepared to move to Winnipeg. Before they left their eldest daughter, Erna, got married. Rudy and Walter wanted to hitchhike to Winnipeg. And so Henry and Tina with their four younger children took the train for Winnipeg. They sold their house in Kitchener and purchased a modest dwelling on Hart Avenue in Winnipeg, not far from the college.

Janzen now settled down to prepare for fall classes. But it did not take very long and the churches in and around Winnipeg began to make heavy demands on him. Most weekends he was out preaching somewhere. The Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute also insisted that he teach a few Bible classes to the high school students. The Southend Mennonite Brethren Church in Winnipeg then asked him to lead their congregation for two years. Together with A. H. Unruh, Janzen regularly gave Bible expositions at the annual Bible conference at the Elmwood church between Christmas

and New Year. All this came on top of his responsibilities at the college.

World War II had just come to an end and thousands of Mennonite refugees from the Soviet Union were streaming into western Europe. The Mennonite Central Committee was deeply involved in ministering to both the spiritual and physical needs of these uprooted people. C. F. Klassen, who had worked for Mennonite Central Committee in Europe but had his home in Winnipeg, begged Janzen to come to Europe and to help him and others with Bible teaching among these homeless and often hopeless Mennonites. The college then released Henry for the spring quarter in 1947 and so he made his way to Europe. He visited refugees in Holland, Germany, Denmark and Switzerland. This three-month visit to Europe was to lead to an entirely new field of service in future years. Altogether Janzen would cross the Atlantic fifteen times in the coming years to teach and preach the word of God in churches, missions and schools in western Europe.

On his first visit he concentrated on the refugee camps, but he was also called upon to speak in Mennonite as well as non-Mennonite churches. Among the refugees Henry found a deep hunger for the word of God. Through his proclamation of the gospel many of these people found Christ as their Savior.

In September Henry was back in class at MBBC. At the close of the college year in 1948, son Rudi decided to get married to a Kitchener girl. So the Janzens decided not only to attend the wedding of their son but also to celebrate their own twenty-fifth wedding anniversary in Kitchener where they had lived so long.

About the same time J. B. Toews, who had been president of the college for three years, decided to return to the USA and become pastor of the Reedley Mennonite Brethren Church in California. To fill this vacancy Janzen was asked to assume the leadership of the college. He served the college altogether for ten years, eight of these as president.

During the 1950-51 academic year Henry was asked by the Board of Missions and the Board of Welfare to minister in Europe once more. He left in July and was away from his family for ten long months (J. H. Quiring, a professor at the college, filled in for him during this time). Again Janzen preached the gospel in churches and conferences all over western Europe. He also got involved in the establishment of the European Mennonite Bible School, in Switzerland (now the Bienenberg). He taught classes at this school for many years between 1950 and 1971. But he also continued to minister to refugees. In the summer of 1951 he returned to his family and to MBBC.

Only a year later, in the summer of 1952, Janzen was back in Europe for a two-month stint of teaching and preaching. This summer he also served at a Bible conference at the St. Chrischona Bible Institute and this was to lead to many years of service at this school of theology in the future—a school with a hundred-year history at the time. He also spoke at the Mennonite World Conference and in churches all over Europe. He was back in Winnipeg for the 1952-53 college year.

For a number of years Henry was a member of the Mennonite Brethren Board of Missions. At one of its sessions in Hillsboro our own application was processed. We were asked to go to Denmark to work among the refugees. Janzen did not raise objections. When he arrived home in Winnipeg he wrote to us in Alberta, inviting us to join the college faculty. We accepted the invitation but decided first to complete seminary in Toronto in the following year. In the summer of 1953 I came to Winnipeg ahead of my family and, although I had known Henry Janzen for some years, this was my first opportunity to get to know him and his family better. I helped the Janzens move into their new home on Chelsea Street just before the college year was to begin.

We found the Janzens to be a very congenial couple and we always got along well. The one concern the faculty had was that

Henry (we never called him "Henry" in those days but always "brother Janzen") devoted too much time to church work and not enough to the college. When he accepted the invitation to lead the Elmwood church in Winnipeg on top of his college responsibilities, some of the senior faculty members persuaded him to retract this commitment, which he did.

Henry had a great gift of communication. His messages were easy to follow and were down to earth. Also he had considerable "presence" in the pulpit, because of his rather patrician bearing. He was meticulous about his clothes and rumor had it (apocryphal no doubt) that Janzen polished college students' shoes upon occasion to teach them a lesson. However, he was not arrogant and related warmly to people of different ages and background. His pastoral visits were greatly appreciated by church members. He had a good sense of humor and could laugh heartily at a good story. In the classroom he felt less secure, for he had never gone through an academic seminary program. In contrast to Dr. A. H. Unruh, who read the writings of theologians such as Brunner and Barth, Janzen was always a bit wary of learned theologians.

In the fall of 1953 he was elected moderator of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches of North America for a three-year period. The summer of 1955 was spent in Europe once again. When he returned it was becoming obvious that his heart was in Europe rather than in America. In 1956 he relinquished his post at the college and made arrangements to go to Europe for a longer period of time.

This was a hard decision for the Janzens. Six children were married by now but their youngest son, Arthur, was only fifteen and he would have to stay behind to finish high school in Canada. But it all worked out well and by Christmas the Janzens were settled in Basel, Switzerland. Tina, to begin with, suffered greatly from homesickness, but with regular correspondence with her children and participation in church life she was able to manage. After

Arthur had finished high school he came to live with his parents in Basel for a year and took some classes at the local university.

Besides Bible conference work and teaching classes at the Bienenberg and at St. Chrischona, Janzen spoke on the radio for a number of years proclaiming the good news of the gospel. For three years Radio Luxemburg carried his messages. This work was supported by Mennonites in Harrisonburg, Virginia. Also he spoke on the radio program *Quelle des Lebens*, aired in Switzerland. He traveled all over Switzerland, southern France, Germany, Austria and Holland conducting Bible conferences.

The year 1962 brought about an interlude in their European sojourn. The Clearbrook Mennonite Brethren Church in British Columbia had invited Janzen to become their pastor. He promised to serve them for two years. Having returned from Europe, they sold their house in Winnipeg and moved to Clearbrook. Here Janzen preached regularly to this large 700-member congregation, taught Wednesday night Bible classes, visited the sick and spoke on the German radio broadcast *Stimme des Evangeliums..*

The two years in Clearbrook passed by quickly and the Janzens then decided to purchase a house in Kitchener and make that their retirement home. However, they were barely settled when Janzen was off for a four-month preaching ministry in Europe once again. They let out their house for rent and Tina joined her husband in his European ministry.

Occasionally they returned to Canada for rest periods, but these interludes were usually not all that restful. In 1966 Henry spent four months in South America, visiting churches, speaking at conferences and on radio HCJB, Quito, Ecuador. His ministry was cut short because of illness. He recovered however and they left for Europe again.

In 1973 they were back in Kitchener for their golden wedding anniversary. The Mennonite Brethren Church prepared the dinner. All the children and most of the grandchildren came home for the

occasion. (Sons Rudy and Walter by now were pastors, following in their father's footsteps). It was a great family celebration.

Janzen's service in Europe spanned twenty-seven years. After crossing the Atlantic numerous times, earlier by ship and later by plane, it was time to retire. On December 25, 1974, Henry preached his last sermon in his home church in Kitchener, although he did not know at the time that it would be his last. Henry and Tina had planned to spend the month of January, 1975, in Florida, but Henry was not at all well and the doctor strongly advised against such a trip. They heeded this advice. Shortly after Henry was stricken with influenza. Other complications set in and he had to be hospitalized. On March 4 the Lord took his servant home. He was seventy-three when he died.

Guests came from across Canada to attend the funeral of a man who had been a great blessing to our churches across the land. Tina received some three-hundred sympathy cards and about fifty letters of condolence. John Froese, the pastor of the Kitchener church at the time, spoke on the text, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7).

Janzen had begun to write his memoirs and they were published later in the *Mennonitische Rundschau* in installments. However, he had covered only the earlier years of his life when the Lord over life and death took the pen from his servant's hand.

How shall one evaluate such a life filled with prodigious labors, constant travels, long separations from wife and children? Paul cautions us not to judge before the Lord comes. In our day some would undoubtedly say that Janzen had his priorities slightly mixed up. However, it is not a very edifying spectacle to see those who have chosen to enjoy a soft life sitting in judgment over people who have endured hardness like good soldiers of Jesus Christ. So we are reminded once more to hold such men in honor.



Bernhard W. and Helena Sawatzky

## 4

## *BERNHARD W. SAWATZKY (1906-1974)*

In 1906 a fifth child was born to Jacob and Anna Sawatzky in the Crimean village of Nikolayevka. They named this boy Bernhard. Two sisters and two brothers had preceded him. When Bernhard was only two years old his mother died. Although his older sisters watched over him, he missed the tender loving care of his mother in his growing up years. Father remarried and the new mother brought two children of her former marriage into the Sawatzky family. This step-mother, unfortunately, did not take kindly to the children of Jacob Sawatzky's first marriage and Bernhard seems to have carried permanent emotional scars from this lack of motherly love and acceptance in the early years of his life.

The Sawatzkys were farmers and Bernhard had to learn the discipline of hard physical work early in life. Like other Mennonite children in Nicolajewka he received his elementary education in the village school under Mennonite teachers. Bernhard's parents were Christians, but he did not share their faith in his teenage years. Although he was somewhat shy by nature, Bernhard participated in the social events in which village young people engaged. Some of these activities were not conducive to a life of faith. Occasionally Bernhard played the violin at village dances and participated in theatrical performances.

He was eight years old when Russia declared war on Germany—a war that was to have a bitter aftermath. Following a bloody conflict which saw the loss of millions of Russian lives the country was caught up in a violent revolution that led to the suffering and death of many more millions of innocent people. Machnov's bandits brought death and destruction to some of the Mennonite colonies, as did the battles between the Red army and

those forces loyal to the Tsar which see-sawed across Russia.

When Bernhard was thirteen his father died of typhus. This disease was spread by soldiers who carried lice. Since the soldiers were often quartered in Mennonite villages a great many people died of this contagion. Besides losing his mother earlier and his father in 1919, one of Bernhard's brothers also lost his life in the Revolution.

As in the Apocalypse the white horse of conquest was followed by the red horse of civil war. These were followed by the black horse of famine. In the early twenties starvation swept thousands of people into their graves. The roving bandits and soldiers had requisitioned all the draught horses as well as all the grain. There was no seed grain and no horses for the field work. Consequently a great many Mennonites died of starvation. The Sawatzkys barely hung on to the ragged edges of their existence.

As a result of a traumatic childhood, revolution and famine, Ben, as he was called in Canada, became bitter and hardened. Having lost faith in both God and people, he developed a cynical view of life. Without a father and without the love of a mother, Ben suffered great loneliness. The prospects for a better life in the Soviet Union had grown rather dim. As an eighteen-year old he decided to leave the country and emigrate to Canada.

After receiving his exit visa and permission to enter Canada Ben left his native land in 1924 and made his way into the unknown, hoping to make a new beginning in a new country. Some relatives of his had left Russia many years ago in an earlier immigration and had settled in Aberdeen, Saskatchewan, north of Saskatoon. This is where he would go.

It was a long and arduous journey. Finally his ship docked and Ben boarded the train which was to take him across eastern Canada to the prairies. Henry Sawatzky, a relative of his who farmed in Aberdeen, took the young man in and employed him on his farm. Ben was happy to have room and board and he enjoyed his work on the fields and in the barns. He did his work very conscientiously but

kept very much to himself and bottled up the many tragic experiences of his past. He had his own room in the large farmhouse. Here he spent many hours in reading when he was not working. Often he was lost in thought and did a lot of daydreaming with his past weighing heavily upon him.

Then something happened in the providence of God that would change the course of his life. C. N. Hiebert, a colporteur for the British and Foreign Bible Society, was invited by the Mennonite Brethren congregation in Aberdeen to conduct evangelistic meetings. Ben was not a believer and had long given up on church attendance. The evangelistic meetings in his community, were of no interest to him.

Since Henry Sawatzky was a leader in the local church, the Sawatzkys had volunteered to host the evangelist for the week of evening services. Ben had no intention of attending the meetings, but as a hired man he felt obligated to take the family, with the evangelist, to church with horse and sleigh. He planned to return home immediately, put the horses in the barn, and then return later to collect the family.

The weather was bitterly cold and when they arrived at the church Hiebert suggested to Ben that since the weather was so miserable he should rather tie the horses to the hitching post on the church yard and come into the church where it was warm. This is what most families living in the community did when they came to church with horses. Ben thought for a moment and decided to take the evangelist's suggestion. He tied up the horses, came into church without removing his heavy winter jacket and sat down in one of the back pews to endure the service and then to take his host family home.

That evening Hiebert preached on one of the best-known passages of Scripture, John 3:16. For the first time in his life Ben heard the Good News of God's love and the promise of eternal life to all those who believe in Christ. No doubt the Spirit of God had

been at work for a long time in his life and he listened attentively to the word of God which penetrated his heart and mind. When at the end of the service the evangelist gave an invitation to those who wanted to receive Christ and to indicate this by standing Ben, to his own surprise, found himself standing up.

When the service ended he walked out to the horses and the sleigh, deeply moved by what he had heard. He took the family and the evangelist home without saying a word. After taking care of the horses he went to his room, not to sleep but to cry to God. He was facing one of the profoundest decisions of his life. Having lived without God for many years his life was about to be re-directed. With great sorrow for his past unbelief and sins he fell to his knees beside his bed and asked God in his mercy to forgive his sins, to cover his past and to let him begin a new life. God heard his cry and a deep peace entered his heart. He had the assurance that he had been accepted into the family of God.

Ben slept little that night. He could hardly wait for morning to arrive. Having believed in his heart he now wanted to confess with his mouth that Jesus was the new lord of his life. When morning came he announced to one and all that he had given his life to Christ. There was much rejoicing in the Sawatzky family that day.

Following his conversion, Ben had to learn to walk the Christian way. He had a deep desire to please God and to learn more about the word of God. One of the first decisive steps which he took, was to ask the church to baptize him and to receive him into membership. Slowly he began to come out of his shell and by God's grace overcame some of his innate reticence and bashfulness. After telling the congregation the story of his conversion he was baptized and received into the Mennonite Brethren Church.

About ten years before Ben came to Canada the Mennonite Brethren had established a Bible school in southern Saskatchewan. Ben was encouraged to enrol in this school in order to become more informed about the Christian faith and to be firmly established in his

commitment to Christ. In the fall of 1926 he packed his bags and headed for the town of Herbert. The Herbert Bible School had a gifted Bible teacher as principal, William Bestvater. Ben was intrigued by all the things he was learning. His room-mate happened to be G. W. Peters, who later became professor of missions not only in Mennonite Brethren schools but also at the Dallas Theological Seminary. On one occasion, when Peters got frustrated and decided to leave the school Ben also began packing his trunk. When Peters realized that if he left Ben would also leave, he changed his mind and stayed.

During the school year it was discovered that Ben had a promising tenor voice and so Bestvater asked him, G. W. Peters, and one other student to join him in forming a gospel quartet. Together with their principal they traveled from church to church in the summer months, singing and preaching the gospel. Not only did this effort give the Bible school good publicity, but it was also a meaningful mentoring process for the student members of the quartet.

In 1928, after two years at the Herbert Bible School, both Sawatzky and Peters decided to transfer to the Winkler Bible School. This school had only recently been established by A. H. Unruh, who had come to Canada in 1925. He had been a Bible teacher in the Crimea and when several of his colleagues also emigrated to Canada he asked them to join him in this new venture in Christian education. Most of the instruction both at the Herbert and Winkler schools was given in the German language.

Ben spent two years in the Winkler Bible School working during the summer months to pay his own way through these school years. Again G. W. Peters was his room-mate. Their personalities were as different as night and day: Peters was out-going and self-assured; Sawatzky was withdrawn and hesitant. One year during the Christmas break the two of them decided to visit several villages in southern Manitoba and to witness to the gospel. When Peters heard

Ben pray that God should give them at least one convert, Peters refused to join in such an “unbelieving” prayer. He expected God to do greater things than that.

Ben’s humble attitude endeared him to both teachers and classmates. Another latent gift that Mr. Wiens, his homiletics teacher, discovered in Ben was the gift of public discourse. When Ben gave his trial sermon in the school chapel service, Wiens gave him high marks. Peters was not quite so fortunate when his turn came because Wiens thought he was too self-confident.

In 1930 Ben graduated from the Winkler School and, as in former years, returned to Aberdeen, Saskatchewan to earn his livelihood by working on the farm. He was now twenty-four years old and began to think seriously about marriage. Henry Sawatzky, his relative who had taken him in when he came from Russia, had a daughter, Helen, whom he had come to know rather well during the years he lived in the Sawatzky home. Ben had developed a liking for this girl and, as their relationship developed, they decided to get married. Helen’s father was a bit concerned that Ben would not be able to support a family since he had no material assets, but he consented to the marriage nevertheless. On July 19, 1931, Ben and Helen were married in Aberdeen in their home congregation.

For several years following their wedding they lived and worked in Aberdeen. Ben also had many opportunities to preach and to teach Biblical subjects in his home congregation. Over the years five children were born to Ben and Helen—Adeline (1932), Myrna (1936), Waldo, who for many years was principal of the Mennonite Educational Institute in Clearbrook, B. C., Charlotte (1942), and Evelyn (1949).

In 1929 the Coaldale community had established a Bible school in southern Alberta. For one reason or another the school faced the 1935-36 school year without teachers. And so the Coaldale Mennonite Brethren Church issued a call to Ben Sawatzky and Jacob H. Quiring (whose home was in Dalmeny, Saskatchewan) to

come to Coaldale to teach the young people in this community which had attracted a great many immigrants from Russia.

I was a boy of thirteen when I attended the opening convocation of the Bible school in 1935. Sawatzky, who had been appointed principal, gave a strong message on the text "O Lord, we beseech thee, give us success" (Ps. 118:25). He had me completely mesmerized and I wondered if I too would some day be able to study with such charismatic teachers.

Ben was generally well received by the Coaldale community although some church members found his sermons a bit too emotionally overpowering. He had a wonderful gift of speaking to the needs of young people; he drew them out and encouraged them to accept challenges in the kingdom of God. Ben was fearless in teaching and preaching what he understood to be the truths of the Scriptures. Young people especially responded to the Christian ideals he held up before them even when at times they were smitten in conscience.

When I was sixteen I enrolled in the Coaldale Bible School. Other faculty members had been added and the school seemed to flourish. I responded positively to Sawatzky's teaching right from the beginning. His courses in Bible, Prayer, Homiletics and others, opened up new worlds of thought for us. The high standards for Christian living which he laid before us did not turn us off; rather, they challenged us to devote our lives to Christ and his kingdom.

For three school years I sat under his teaching. In my final year the Sawatzkys offered me a small room in their house where I could stay (the Bible school had a dining hall, but no dormitories). I kept very much to myself that year and tried not to interfere in the life of the family. Occasionally Sawatzky would come into my room in the evening and pray with me. In the end he won me for the kingdom of God.

Several years later he took me along on preaching/teaching tours in northern Alberta. We visited several churches and also

taught Daily Vacation Bible School in several outlying communities. On yet another occasion, when we were colleagues at the Coaldale Bible School, he asked me to go with him to Fort Vermillion, in the far north, to look up Old Colony Mennonites who had settled along the banks of the Peace River, in order to get away from the evils of this present world. We hired a horse and buggy and for days traveled through the woods, looking up families, to see whether we might teach DVBS. Unfortunately, our efforts at evangelism were not welcome. Moreover, our visit was cut short when Ben received a telegram, informing him that his wife was in a Calgary hospital, undergoing a cancer operation.

After university studies it was no small privilege for me, to be invited to join the faculty of the Coaldale Bible School, and to have my former teacher as colleague. In fact, he insisted on handing over the principalship to me after he had led the school for more than a decade. He could have made things difficult for a freshman like me, but he always stood by me and helped me in numerous ways. We became life-long friends.

For twenty-two years Sawatzky taught in Coaldale and hundreds of young people today are serving today because of his influence. Not only did he teach in Bible school but he also preached in the churches of Alberta and even in other provinces. Ben had the gift of evangelism and many people were converted through his ministry. Occasionally he also served as Bible colporteur for the Home Missions branch of the Alberta Mennonite Brethren Church. In 1939 the Coaldale congregation ordained Ben to the gospel ministry. His sermons were always well prepared, had a clear outline, and were sprinkled with appropriate illustrations. He spoke at a very rapid pace and his dramatic presentation of the word of God often sent a tingling down my spine.

Since Bible schools in those days ran for only the five or six winter months the teachers had to fend for themselves the rest of year. Moreover, the remuneration which they received during the

months that school was in session was rather meager. So when school closed the teachers had to look for seasonal work. It was not beneath Ben's dignity to work at any job in the community that became available. Such temporary jobs never paid very well and so the families of Bible school teachers in those years had to live rather frugally. Ben's wife, Helen, came from a more well-to-do background than he did and found it quite hard to get along on such a low income. As in most families there were often misunderstandings between the two of them, but they remained faithful to each other and were able to bring up five fine children.

Discipline in the home was strict and the children had to learn early to shoulder their share of household duties and to take care of a large garden. Family devotions around the breakfast table when Ben, at the head of the table, would read the Scriptures in a low and quiet voice are remembered as sacred moments up to this day by the children. All the children sitting around the table would say their prayers. Often the family would sing hymns together. Once the children were a bit older they even sang four-part harmony. These were joyous occasions.

As for play, there was little emphasis on athletic activity in the Sawatzky family. Table-games, however, and putting together jigsaw puzzles provided much amusement. After living in Coaldale for fourteen years the family was finally able to afford a car. In 1949 they purchased a second-hand Model A Ford and that made it possible for the family to go for rides on Sunday afternoons. During such rides there was much singing and sprightly conversation. Ben was a great story teller and the children remember how he used to entertain them with his fascinating yarns. He could make his children roar with laughter one moment and reduce them to tears the next.

Family loyalty was strong and as the children grew up and began to earn some money they gave it to the parents to purchase the necessities of life. Although money was hard to come by,

members of the Coaldale church were generous in supplying the family with meat, cracklings, honey and other produce. Since the Sawatzkys always planted a huge garden, Helen made sure that hundreds of jars of canned vegetables were stashed away annually for the long winter months.

During the years that Ben taught in the Coaldale Bible School and his children grew up he worked hard at improving his educational background. He applied for admission to the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon, but since he no academic records from Russia and his five years of Bible institute training were of no significance to the Registrar, the university hesitated in accepting him as a student. What did impress the registrar was the fact that he spoke three languages (English, German and Russian). He was admitted as an Adult Special to begin with, which meant that he was on probation. If he could handle university courses he could proceed toward his B. A.

Ben began his studies in Saskatoon with summer sessions (he chose Saskatoon over against Edmonton because there was a Mennonite Brethren Church in Saskatoon). This meant leaving the family for the summer. The university authorities were quite satisfied with his academic performance and eventually gave him permission to proceed toward his degree. As he neared the completion of his program of studies he decided to ask for a one-year leave of absence from his teaching position in the Coaldale school and to spend an entire year at the university. Finances did not permit the entire family to move to Saskatoon and so he spent a rather lonely year in Saskatoon, although he returned home for Christmas. He completed his degree with a few more courses by extension. Considering his age, the financial restraints under which he worked and the fact that he had to support a growing family, his accomplishments were really quite astounding. Later, when the family moved to Edmonton, he took a number of education courses. All this was in a day when university education was not particularly

encouraged by the Mennonite Brethren Church. Ben was convinced that university training would enhance his performance as a teacher of young people, not to mention personal enrichment.

After twenty-two years in the classroom in Coaldale Ben was asked by the Alberta Home Missions Committee to move to Edmonton to establish a Mennonite Brethren church in that city. A number of Mennonite families were already living in Edmonton and it was the hope of the committee that they would provide the core for a new congregation. The move to Edmonton in 1957 created quite an upheaval for the family after living so long in a rather quiet and sheltered farming community. That same year their eldest daughter married Henry Bergen of Calgary. Both of them died at a rather young age. The other children eventually found their spouses in Edmonton.

The beginnings in Edmonton were hard. Ben contacted some of the Mennonite Brethren members who had moved to the city because of job opportunities and soon a fellowship group was formed. Although Ben had graduated from university and could write English quite well, his ability to preach in English was limited. For the first several years the growth of the church was consequently limited largely to people who could speak German. Mid-week fellowship meetings were in the Sawatzky home. The children helped in Sunday school. Myrna, Waldo and Charlotte, the older children, besides helping along in the life of the church, got jobs and helped to pay for the parental home and to build their own futures.

Then tragedy struck. In the year the family moved to the city, Ben noticed that there was something wrong with him. What he did not know was that he was suffering from a debilitating disease. By 1960 he could no longer function normally and he resigned from church work. He now faced the difficult problem of supporting Helen and their youngest daughter, Evelyn, who was only eleven years of age. After it had been officially established that he had Huntington's Chorea, he was able to get a job as desk clerk at the

YMCA. Later, as the disease progressed, he became janitor. The pay was minuscule, but with the help of the older children they were able to keep afloat financially.

After four years at the YMCA the disease had progressed to the point where Ben could no longer work and he had to apply for Social Assistance. This carried the Sawatzkys through until Ben reached the age of sixty-five and began receiving Old Age Pension. He was hospitalized permanently at age sixty and for eight years, until his death at sixty-eight, Helen leaned heavily on her son, Waldo, for assistance. (The older girls were married by now and had their own families.) This was a very difficult time for Helen and she suffered emotionally for several years.

Peter Rempel had meantime assumed the leadership of the Edmonton church and visited Ben regularly in the hospital during those long years of sickness. On one occasion when I was invited to give a series of messages in the Edmonton congregation, Peter got permission to have Ben released from the hospital to have dinner with me. It was a heart-warming experience to meet after many years. At the same time it was heart-wrenching to see my old friend and colleague suffer. His children also visited him frequently in the hospital and often got passes to take their father out for pie and coffee.

On February 9, 1974, the Lord called his suffering servant home. At the funeral service several of his favorite songs were sung by the congregation: "In the Rifted Rock I'm Resting," and "O Have You Not Heard of That Beautiful Stream." Marvin Schmidt, who by then had become the pastor of the church, led the service and also read the obituary. Peter Rempel, the former pastor who had been Sawatzky's student in Coaldale, preached the funeral sermon from the text: "Thy right hand shall hold me" (Ps. 73:23). Rudy Wiebe, a member of the church and professor of English at the university, sang another of Ben's favorites: "Have Thine Own Way, Lord." Tributes poured in as God's faithful servant was laid to rest,

awaiting the great resurrection morning. An Indo-Canadian male nurse, who had served on the ward in which Ben had lain so long, commented, "Ben was truly a man of God."

For hundreds of students he had been a guide on the way that leads to the city of God. He modeled costly discipleship for them and inspired them to devote their lives to service in God's kingdom. He was not a perfect saint, of course, but he loved God and his Word and had great concern for people who did not know Christ and who had lost their way. His children knew of his short temper which he had not always been able to control. If he did lose control, he was quick to ask his family for forgiveness. He himself was quick to forgive and did not carry grudges. Ben was a humble man and never ceased to marvel at God's grace which had reached him in his lost condition, gave him the freedom and the gifts to serve the church and to lead many people to the Savior.

Ben was an avid reader and he also encouraged his children to read. If they ever mistreated a book they were sharply reprimanded. His first love, however, was teaching—an art he had mastered so well that students usually sat with wrapped attention when he lectured.

Helen, Ben's wife, remarried some time after her husband's death. She passed away in 1990 after living in B. C. for many years with her second husband.

I cannot think of anyone to whom I felt as close as to B. W. Sawatzky. He won me for Christ's Kingdom; he taught me my first faltering steps in the ministry; he modeled teaching and preaching for me; he encouraged me to pursue higher education; and when I was invited to join the college faculty in Winnipeg, he encouraged me to accept the challenge, even though that meant the parting of ways for us. I shall never forget until my dying day what Ben Sawatzky did for me. We were living in the United States when we heard of his death and so I wrote a tribute to him for the *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, under the caption: "Poor, yet making many rich."



John A. and Nettie (Willms) Toews

## 5

*JOHN A TOEWS (1912 -1979)*

Like many others of his generation, John A. Toews had his roots in the Mennonite "commonwealth" in the Ukraine. In the year 1908 Aaron Toews married Agnes Harms from the village of Friedensruh, in the Molotschna colony. Toews was a school teacher in the Mennonite village of Rueckenau and also a minister in the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Church, known as the *Allianzgemeinde*. God gave the Toewses two daughters, Agnes and Mary, and two sons, John and Nick. John, their third child, was born in 1912 shortly before the outbreak of the First World War. This tragic conflict was to bring the Czarist regime, under which the Mennonite colonies had flourished for more than a hundred years, to an end.

The Bolshevik Revolution which followed the war brought death, destruction and famine to the once prosperous Mennonite settlements in the Ukraine. By God's mercy the Toews family survived imminent death at the hands of terrorists. However, the prospects for Christian teachers in an avowedly atheistic regime seemed so bleak that the family decided to join thousands of others and emigrate to Canada.

John was fourteen when the family obtained its exit visas and prepared to leave the Soviet Union. He had completed elementary school and two years of *Zentralschule*. Although the times were badly out of joint, he had received a good foundation in the basic disciplines of learning. He had a good command of German, handled Russian reasonably well, and soon he was to add English to his linguistic equipment.

The family left for Canada in 1926. The beginnings in this new land were difficult. Like most Mennonite teachers from Russia who did not speak English and whose teaching credentials were not

honored in Canada, Toews' father turned to farming. The family was able to procure some land in Namaka, a quiet hamlet about fifty miles southeast of Calgary, Alberta. Several other Mennonite families settled here, not only to eke out an existence for themselves but also to establish a church. The Namaka congregation, of which Aaron Toews became the leader, was at that time associated with the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Church.

Pioneer days in Namaka were anything but easy. Drought and other disasters made material progress very difficult. To top it all off, the Toews home was destroyed by fire in 1942. Not only did the family lose all their personal belongings but John's father also lost all the manuscript materials for a projected publication on Mennonite martyrs.

John grew up on this windswept prairie farm, learning the discipline of hard work and a simple life style. Whatever he did he did with considerable zest and concentration, not only in his youth but throughout his life. Farming, however, was not to be John's calling.

Through the influence of his godly parents and the instruction from the Scriptures received in the church, John had committed his life to Christ even before the family left the Soviet Union. At the age of twelve he asked his father to help him come to personal faith in Christ. His father encouraged his son to personalize Isaiah 53:5, "He was wounded for (John's) transgressions, he was bruised for (John's) iniquities . . . and with his stripes (John) was healed." A deep peace settled into his heart and he had the assurance that his sins were forgiven and that God had received him as his child. This initial commitment to the Savior was confirmed when John confessed his faith publicly in baptism in the Namaka congregation. "Conversion" became a common theme in John's preaching after he entered upon the ministry of the gospel.

In the early thirties, the Depression years, John enrolled at the Coaldale Bible School established in 1929 by the Coaldale

Mennonite Brethren congregation in southern Alberta. He enjoyed his studies and profited greatly from the instruction given by godly teachers. It was also here that he became attracted to Nettie Willms, a fellow student. Nettie had also come from Russia with her brother and sisters, but without parents. The relationship between John and Nettie blossomed into courtship and on November 9, 1935, they were married. A fierce blizzard threatened to spoil their wedding plans, but did not dampen the joys of the celebration. Throughout their married life Nettie stood by her husband in good days and bad and was a tower of strength for him. For some forty years they served the Lord together.

After their wedding John and Nettie rented a farm in Namaka for two years. However, it soon became obvious that God was calling them to a teaching and preaching ministry. Through the influence of his parents, his church and his studies at the Coaldale Bible School, John developed a deep interest in proclaiming the Good News of the gospel. As opportunities came his way he tried his wings at speaking God's Word in public. His home congregation recognized his gifts in this area of ministry and encouraged him in his efforts. He realized, however, that if God should call him to the teaching/preaching ministry he would have to seek further training. In those years it was almost unheard of that Mennonite young men (let alone women) attended university. William Aberhardt (later the premier of Alberta) had founded the Prophetic Bible Institute in Calgary and John decided to continue his training in Biblical Studies at this school.

Although John learned many good and useful things at this institute, he found it rather perverse to be taught that the Sermon on the Mount, which was so central in Mennonite teaching, did not apply to the church but represented the laws of the coming millennial kingdom. It also struck him as exceedingly strange to hear that Jesus had come not to establish the church but to restore the political kingdom to Israel. Perhaps this helps us to understand

why Toews in later years often criticized Dispensationalism so severely. He had received an overdose of this Darbyist method of interpreting the Scriptures at the Prophetic Bible Institute.

Mennonites in Canada did not establish their own college until the forties. The Mennonite Brethren in the United States, however, operated Tabor College in Hillsboro, Kansas. In 1937 John and Nettie decided to make their way to Hillsboro for further studies. After three years at Tabor College John graduated with his Bachelor of Theology degree. He had profited greatly from his studies at Tabor and from living among American Mennonite Brethren. During his years at Tabor John had opportunities to preach God's word in several churches in the Hillsboro community. For some time he served the Tampa congregation as student pastor. It was also in Hillsboro that their first child, Elfrieda, was born. Many years later, in 1950, Tabor College honored John, one of its star alumni, by choosing him to be the recipient of the Alumnus of the Year award.

Before graduating, Toews received a call from Coaldale, inviting him to join the faculty of the Coaldale Bible School where he had earlier been a student. And so in 1940, fresh from his studies at Tabor College, the Toews family moved to Coaldale. I had enrolled at the Coaldale Bible School in the fall of 1939 and was in my second year when Toews began his teaching career. We looked the new teacher over rather carefully and soon discovered that he would be a great asset to the school. (The other faculty members that year were B. W. Sawatzky, J. H. Quiring, and John Unger.) Among other things that struck us were his curly hair and his laughter. In those days laughter was often viewed as "shallowness" but that was not at all the case with J. A. Toews. On one occasion, in a class in Church History, Toews asked a question to which a student gave an answer which was rather wide of the mark and Toews turned to the blackboard and exploded in hilarious laughter. As young people we found this quite appealing.

For two years I sat under his teaching, impressed with his well organized lectures and by the speed with which he spoke. Under his instruction the Gospels, Missions and Church History came to life. He was an open faced man. We could always tell how he felt by watching his face - particularly obvious when the Bible school choir, which he directed, failed to produce the harmony that the notes seemed to call for.

For six years (1940-46) Toews taught in the Coaldale Bible School. Classes ran from fall until spring and since the teachers were paid only for the months in which they taught they all had to find other employment for the six summer months. Frequently local farmers would hire the Bible teachers and since they all had a background in farming they knew the tricks of the trade. However, to go from classroom to backbreaking labor in the fields was no easy task. Fortunately Toews had been blessed with a strong constitution and soon gained the reputation of being a hard and conscientious worker.

Besides teaching during the winter months and working in the fields in summer, Toews was involved in the life of the large Coaldale congregation and in other churches in the area. Coaldale practiced a so-called "multiple ministry" and we were always glad when it was Toews' turn to preach.

Toews had a burden for evangelism and for outreach into the community. Since however the worship services of the Coaldale church were conducted exclusively in German, it was quite impossible to bring English-speaking neighbors to church. This led to a lot of frustration on the part of many of us who were fired up in Bible school to witness to our non-Christian neighbors. Several attempts were made to have evangelistic services in English in locations other than the church, but the church was not yet ready for such innovations. Occasionally John incurred the displeasure of the church leadership because of his mission emphasis—something we as teenagers, who were trying to break out of some of our

ecclesiastical traditions, carried over from Europe, thoroughly appreciated. John, however, was always concerned that he have a good relationship with the leaders of the church, even though he might be critical of some of their views.

After his gift as an evangelist became known other churches in Alberta invited John from time to time to hold evangelistic services. A great many people were won for the Lord through his gospel ministry. His preaching/teaching gifts were also greatly appreciated by the churches of Alberta. A year after settling in Coaldale he was ordained to the ministry by his home church in Namaka. John accepted ordination as a sign that the churches had confidence in him. However, he held firmly to the priesthood of all believers and rejected all pompous-clericalism.

When the Toewses came to Coaldale, World War II was in full swing and the principle of non-resistance, for which Mennonites had stood for hundreds of years, was once again being put to the test. Some Mennonite men of military age violated this principle and joined the armed forces; others spent a number of years in camps set up for conscientious objectors. John was called upon to visit these camps in western Canada and to minister to the spiritual needs of the young men. His experiences during these years provided him with the background for his master's thesis, which he wrote ten years later at the University of Manitoba, entitled: *Alternative Service in Canada-During World War II*.

To further his education John began attending summer sessions at the University of Saskatchewan. For his final year the family moved to Saskatoon where they lived in a rented basement and boarded two other university students to make a little extra money. John received his B.A. with a major in History in the spring of 1947. By then the Mennonite Brethren Bible College had been established in Winnipeg and John was asked to join its faculty. That opened up a new chapter in the life of the Toews family. By now they had three children (Elfrieda, Wilma and John); two more (David and

Irene) were born in Winnipeg where the family lived for twenty years and where the five children grew up.

During his long tenure at the college Toews taught a variety of courses. He regularly taught Church History, Systematic Theology, Mennonite History and the Book of Acts. *Acts* was a favorite of his, because it allowed him to stay in touch with Biblical studies. Of course it also provided him with the first chapter of his Church History course.

Besides teaching these and other courses such as Homiletics, John served as Dean of Students for a number of years. He found some aspects of this office rather onerous. The college had fairly strict rules on student deportment in the early years of its existence and it was the duty of the Dean of Students to see that these rules were observed. Worldly amusements, such as theater attendance, were prohibited; a strict dress code had to be observed (including a daily shave for the fellows). Students were asked to report weekly to the Dean on their extra-curricular activities. Since John tended to carry his heart on his sleeve, students were not always sure that he could keep secrets. Students had to get his permission for dates and sometimes it leaked out who was going with whom. In 1956, when Toews became president of the college, he was happy to relinquish this post. He served as president until 1967.

In his more than twenty years as college teacher scores of students sat in his classes in History, Theology and Bible. Many of them are still in Christian service around the world. In less than twenty years after the college was founded it was reported that 106 students had gone into missionary service, 102 into the preaching ministry, 241 into teaching and 51 into the ministry of music—not to mention the hundreds who were active in church and Sunday school work. While John would not claim credit for such remarkable success, he was glad to be a partner in service so blessed of God.

Since the college strove for respectable academic standards, John felt the need to further his education. Almost immediately

after moving to Winnipeg he enrolled at United College (now the University of Winnipeg). In 1950 he received his Bachelor of Divinity degree. The thesis he presented was entitled: *The Anabaptist Concept of the Church*. This topic reflected his deepening concern for the Anabaptist heritage of the Mennonite Brethren.

In 1955 Toews published a booklet that was read widely and had a profound influence on students in Mennonite schools and beyond. It was entitled: *True Non-Resistance Through Christ: A Study of Biblical Principles*.

Sabbatical leaves were rare in the forties and fifties and so John enrolled in a two-year Master's program at the University of Manitoba, taking courses for several years while teaching full-time at the college. In 1953 when I joined the faculty of MBBC, he was granted a half year to complete his M.A. thesis. He had considerable trouble with his eyes during that year, but the Lord mercifully restored his vision. By the time he graduated from the university he had been asked to assume the presidency of the college. As registrar I served in an administrative capacity with John for some ten years. I knew him first as a teacher, then as a colleague, and now as administrator. Although he was ten years my senior he took me fully into his confidence and even though we did not always see eye to eye, those were years in which we worked together with joy and enthusiasm. There were few things that happened in our families, our church, or our denomination, which we did not share with each other.

John loved to converse and to dialogue with his colleagues and made a habit of dropping in on us in our offices in the morning before classes began. He fostered a spirit of openness and confidence in our weekly faculty meetings. He was hesitant to make major decisions on his own and always sought the backing of the faculty in such cases. This may have looked like a weakness on his part, but it reflected his conviction that good leadership calls for

consensus building. Since faculty members in the first twenty years of the college's history had come up through the ranks of the Mennonite Brethren Church there were few doctrinal differences or disputes. Trust and confidence were valued more than uniformity in religious terminology.

In 1957 Dr. Frank C. Peters joined the faculty and he was subsequently appointed as Academic Dean of the college. Peters pushed for greater emphasis on the Liberal Arts and this led to an affiliation of the college with Waterloo College (now Wilfrid Laurier University). Later, when out-of-the-province affiliations were discontinued, MBBC worked out a similar academic arrangement with the University of Winnipeg.

Academic demands on the faculty continued to increase and this led Toews to pursue a Ph.D. at the University of Minnesota. At fifty years of age, when some people begin to live at a slower pace, he took up the challenge of earning a doctorate in History. In preparation for his studies he decided to improve his Russian (one of his modern language requirements). For an entire academic year we traveled to University of Manitoba together on Saturdays, where he enrolled in Russian and I in Hebrew classes.

With summer sessions and several shorter leaves during the academic year John completed his residence requirements in a relatively short period of time. After sitting for comprehensive examinations and presenting his dissertation on "Sebastian Frank: Friend and Critic of Early Anabaptism", he was awarded his Doctor of Philosophy in 1964. Three years later John left the college to take up other ministries. His return to the college in 1976, after more than ten years of absence, was in a sense a great homecoming for him. This last stretch of his teaching career was cut short by his sudden death in January, 1979.

Although John was trained in History he was above all a servant of the Word of God. In his earlier ministry his sermons carried a strong evangelistic note. Many people in Canada, Paraguay, and

other parts of the world were converted to Christ under his preaching. Later the emphasis in his preaching shifted more to the life of discipleship, Christian ethics and service. He usually preached with great fervor and at times his emotions got the better of him. His sermons were usually of an expository nature with a clearly spelled out outline. If he said "firstly," you could expect a "secondly" and "thirdly" (he used to say that a chair with three legs stood better than one with two). In 1992 when Herald Press published my book of sermons, I was delighted to pay tribute to my teacher and colleague by dedicating the volume to "The late J. A. Toews, for many years president of the Mennonite Brethren Bible College - teacher, friend, and colleague in the Gospel ministry—who by his example modeled expository preaching."

For ten years in succession John and I spent Easter weekends in St. Catharines, Ontario for a three-day Bible conference. To begin with we traveled by train; later, when flying became more common, by air up to Toronto where someone from St. Catharines picked us up. Normally we worked our way through one of the epistles in the New Testament in six or seven sessions. The Elmwood Mennonite Brethren Church in Winnipeg had an annual three-day Bible conference immediately after Christmas. It ran for fifty years and here too, John and I worked together for many years in Bible exposition, joined later by F. C. Peters. In two successive years the three of us expounded Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. These lectures were then published under the title: *Das Ernste Ringen Um Die Reine Gemeinde*.

John's pulpit style carried over to the classroom and vice versa. But he was not only a preacher and a teacher, he was also a Conference leader. For many years he served on the boards of Reference and Counsel of Manitoba, of Canada and of the General Conference. In fact, he was moderator of the General Conference at the time of his death. In chairing Conferences he was more concerned about a brotherly spirit than in the finer points of

"Roberts' Rules of Order." Often at the end of the deliberations he would ask for forgiveness if he had offended anyone in the give and take of Conference sessions.

Costly discipleship, non-resistance, integrity in daily life, concern for the poor and the suffering, a believers' church—these were the primary areas of his concern. With his great interest in our Anabaptist heritage he was naturally also in favor of inter-Mennonite cooperation where this was possible. Mennonite Central Committee and Mennonite World Conference were close to his heart. When John died the executive secretary of the Mennonite World Conference, Paul Kraybill, sent a telegram, in which he underscored the valuable asset John had been to the Conference's presidium. John found it hard to understand why some of our church leaders found it easier to identify with the National Association of Evangelicals, many of whom were militarists, than with other branches of the Mennonite community. Conversely, some of our church leaders criticized him for his emphasis on our Anabaptist heritage and his hesitation in aligning himself with popular American evangelicalism.

John's interest in the Mennonite community went beyond the boundaries of North America. In 1951 the college released him for a spiritual ministry in Paraguay, Uruguay and Brazil. He endured the separation from his family for six months in order to preach the gospel in Mennonite settlements in these lands. A great many people in South America accepted Christ through his preaching. He returned to these lands on several other occasions and his teaching/preaching ministry had a profound effect on the Mennonite churches in Latin America. Through the articles he wrote for the *Mennonitische Rundschau*, readers back home in Canada were kept informed of the movement of God's Spirit in churches under the Southern Cross.

After Toews left the college in 1967, the family spent a year in Europe where John served schools and churches in teaching and

preaching. In 1970 he was able to visit the Soviet Union—the fulfilment of a dream he had had for a long time. Shortly before his death he had another opportunity to preach to several Mennonite churches in Asiatic Russia where he had the joy of seeing many people turn to Christ.

From 1968-1971 John served as pastor in the Fraserview Mennonite Brethren Church, Vancouver. His teaching and preaching was much appreciated by the congregation, although the switch from the classroom to the pastorate was not easy for him. It was during these years that he began to work on a history of the Mennonite Brethren Church. After doing considerable preliminary research the Toewses moved to Fresno for the 1971-72 academic year. Here John taught several classes at the seminary and completed the manuscript on the *History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* which was then published.

In spite of his many other activities besides carrying a full teaching load, John published numerous articles. A bibliography of his writings over a period of 45 years (running to 12 pages of titles) can be found in the book published in his honor in 1981: *People of the Way*, edged by Abe Dueck, Herbert Giesbrecht and Allen Guenther. During the ten years that I was editor of the theological journal *The Voice*, Toews contributed articles regularly, not only on time but also in a form that did not call for editing.

The seminary in Fresno would have been happy to retain John's services as professor of Historical Theology but John and Nettie chose rather to settle in British Columbia where Toews then taught in the history department of Trinity Western University at Langley. Also, he offered several evening classes at Regent College, Vancouver.

John's training in history helped him to put his theology into historical perspective. His sermons, too, were often dotted with references to historical events from which believers in today's world could learn valuable lessons. Like Santayana he held, that "those

who do not remember the past are condemned to relive it." Repeatedly he spoke on the identity crisis that some Mennonite churches were experiencing and exhorted them not to cut themselves off from their historical roots and thereby to become "faceless" churches. He did not really like to hear of the Anabaptist-Mennonite "distinctives" because that sounded as if they were "add-ons" to the gospel. He insisted that these so-called "distinctives" (such as non-resistance) were embedded in the teachings of Jesus and the apostles.

Theologically Toews was generally quite conservative, although the battle over the inerrancy of the Bible did not particularly interest him. He was more concerned that people understood the Bible and lived by its teachings rather than spend a lot of energy defending its truthfulness. Having received an overdose of Darbyism when he was a student at the Prophetic Bible Institute, Calgary, he espoused a non-dispensational approach to the Bible. This did not exactly endear him to some of our church leaders at the time many of whom had accepted the dispensational hermeneutic. Because he did not permit himself to be squeezed into the mold of popular evangelicalism he was often criticized by ministers within his own denomination. John tended to be quite sensitive to criticism - not the reasonable kind which focuses on the issues but the offensive kind which expresses itself in personal attacks. He believed that he was contending for the faith that had its roots in the apostolic church.

The Toewses had a happy family life and John drew great strength from his family. His wife, Nettie, faithfully supported him in his work for the kingdom of God. Five healthy and gifted children were born to John and Nettie. The complaint of John Newton that his father loved him but seemingly did not want his son to know it could not be said of John. He loved his children and thought highly of them. I recall how delighted he was when his daughter, Elfrieda, went to teach in Africa and how distraught he

was when his son John was badly injured in a farm accident one summer. He rejoiced in their successes and suffered when they went contrary to his understanding of the Christian life. Like other parents, especially those who had teenagers in the 1960s, the Toewses were not spared a certain amount of pain as their children struggled to become independent.

The Toewses never had many earthly possessions. John's parents had lost everything in the Bolshevik Revolution and Nettie came to Canada as an orphan. Both of them knew how ephemeral the things of this earth can be. Moreover their consciences had been sensitized by the poverty in which they lived in their early years in Canada. Quite naturally, then, John abhorred waste and lavish life styles. He was even critical of his own denomination when he felt that the monies collected in the churches were not spent as wisely as they might be.

John spent the closing days of his life in Winnipeg lecturing at MBBC. One cold January morning in 1979 he suffered a heart attack and went home to be with the Lord. In his last prayer session with his colleagues at the college he spoke on I. Corinthians 13, stressing the abiding qualities of the Christian life: faith, hope and love. These three, he went on to say, in a sense also represented stages in his own pilgrimage. In earlier years he had thought "faith" (in the sense of doctrine) was most important. Later, "hope" took on greater significance. And now as he got older, "love" seemed to tower over all else.

Love was there all along, of course. John loved people and was concerned that others should love him too. He had a great capacity for friendship. I recall coming home from studies in Chicago one night. Due to mechanical problems the plane did not arrive in Winnipeg until 2 a.m. in the morning. And who should be at the airport to pick me up at that unearthly hour but J. A. Toews.

In a sermon he preached at the annual Bible conference in Winnipeg I heard him quote with approval the observation of the

Mennonite historian, P. M. Friesen: "The greatness of a man is measured by his loyalty to the ideas which he pursues, according to his inner conviction." Measured by that standard, J. A. Toews was great. He, of course, would be the first to acknowledge with Paul the apostle, "By the grace of God I am what I am." At his funeral the college choir sang so fittingly the beatitude: "How Blessed Are They Who Serve the Lord."



Jacob H. and Helene (Janzen) Franz

## 6

*Jacob H. Franz (1913-1978)*

The parents of Jacob Franz lived in the village of Ebenfeld in Tsarist Russia, enjoying the salubrious climate of the Crimea. Four children were born to the Franzes; the eldest, a daughter, followed by Jake (as we shall call him) and two younger brothers. Mother belonged to the Evangelical Mennonite Church (known as the *Allianzgemeinde*); father evidently did not profess to be a Christian.

Jake was born in July 1913, a year before Russia declared war on Germany and its allies—a conflict that brought the relatively peaceful sojourn of the Mennonites in Russia to a tragic end. The end of the war unleashed the Bolshevik Revolution, bringing civil war, famine and bloodshed in its train. The Franz family suffered so severely in the famine of the early twenties that they barely survived. Moreover, they were no longer in a position to provide their children with the necessities of daily life.

In their village lived a childless couple, the Frank Koops, who were aware of the plight of the Franz family and decided to help. Not only were the Franzes desperately impoverished but Mrs. Franz, who gave what food they had to her children, was close to death by starvation. As Christians who had a heart for the needy, the Koops took Jake's sister, Agatha, into their home. And when Jake's mother lay dying he also went to the Koops for one meal a day. After the death of Mrs. Franz their other two sons, Hermann and Peter, went to live with an aunt for a while but then returned again to their father. When Jake's sister, Agatha, died the Koops took Jake into their home. He was not well either and both he and his adoptive parents feared he might soon follow his sister to the grave. However, when they took the eight-year old boy to the doctor, he was told that he could live for eighty years-something he would proudly let visitors who came to the home of the Koops, know.

The Koops could not have dreamt that this sickly boy would some day have a profound influence on people living in continents unknown to them at the time.

The Koops in their generosity felt obligated to adopt more needy children and so two more boys were added to the family: Henry and Jake Allert. Jake Franz kept his family name; Henry and Jake Allert took on the Koop family name (although Henry, at the time of his marriage, reverted to the Allert name).

The economic and political horizon looked very dark for Mennonites after Stalin established himself as supreme ruler in 1925 and introduced his repressive regime. So the Koops began to make preparations for emigration to Canada. By the year 1929 it was becoming virtually impossible to get exit visas and when rumor spread that several families had received such permits in Moscow, some thirteen thousand Mennonites made their way to the capital. The Koops, with the help of a Russian friend, also traveled to Moscow and after six weeks of anxious waiting were granted their visas (about eight thousand Mennonites did not receive permission to leave and were sent back, many of them to exile and to death in Siberia).

The Koops with their three adopted boys left Moscow by train on December 5, 1929, crossed the border into Latvia and from there took ship to Canada. The "Melita" landed in St. John, New Brunswick, in February and then began the almost endless train-ride across Canada; their destination: Coaldale, Alberta. A great many immigrants from Russia had already settled in this rich irrigation district, eking out a livelihood by growing sugar beets. Eventually a large Mennonite Brethren and a General Conference church, were established in the Coaldale community. Because Mrs. Koop had a brother in Coaldale it was only natural that they should settle here.

Jake was sixteen years of age when the family came to Coaldale and there was no thought of continuing his education which had been rudely disrupted by the disasters that befell Russia. Mr. Koop,

together with the two older boys Jake and Henry, got a job working for Dogtorom, a farmer who paid them fifty cents per day. Jake's father and his two brothers, who had stayed behind in Russia, wrote to the Koops and asked them to help them come to Canada. But with no financial means at their disposal and the doors in the Soviet Union closing there was little they could do. For Jake this was a very painful experience for it meant that he would never see his true father and brothers again. What added to the pain was their letters to him in which they begged for help and told him how much they missed him. However, Jake realized that his adoptive parents could do little to change the situation. After all that the Koops had done for him there was no change in the loving relationship between him and his adoptive parents.

Mr. Dogtorom was willing to sell a quarter section of land to the Koops. They then assumed a large mortgage and settled on a farm that lay between Coaldale and Lethbridge. Jake spent his later teenage years working for his parents on this farm. Although he had made a commitment to follow Jesus when he was a child, Jake had drifted away from the faith of his childhood and when, at the age of twenty-one, he was encouraged to spend the winter at the Coadale Bible School he did not profess to be a believer. In fact he had resolved that no one at the Bible school was going to convert him. It may strike us as a bit strange that he should have enrolled at a Bible school at all but most of the young people of the community attended this school during the five winter months when there was little to do on the farms.

One day after school he was on his way from the Bible school to his room in town when he saw the principal of the school, Abram Schierling, ahead of him on the path that led to town. He slowed down for he did not want to meet that man. But then he felt ashamed of his cowardice and briskly continued his walk until he caught up with Schierling, certain that this rather stern teacher would try to convert him to the Christian faith. Schierling asked

him whether he professed to be a believer and Jake said no. After a long silence he asked Jake whether he ever prayed. In all honesty he had to admit that he had prayed upon occasion. Schierling said nothing until they came to the parting of their ways and then only added: "Then let's continue to pray." That kind of approach was too much for Jake. He became so restless that evening that he went to see Mr. Schierling who prayed with him and led him to the Lord. A deep sense of peace entered Jake's life. This was the beginning of a sincere and life-long friendship with Mr. Schierling, even though Schierling did get on his nerves at times.

Some time after his conversion experience, in 1936, Jake was baptized and received into membership of the Mennonite Brethren Church. He now was determined that he would continue his biblical studies at the Bible school. He graduated after completing the three-year program of studies. His summers were spent working on his parents' farm, but he also began to take a keen interest in Christian service. He sang in the church choir, taught Sunday school and also Daily Vacation Bible School in the school districts of southern Alberta. He was affirmed in his teaching and preaching gifts by members of his church and decided then to continue his training at the Prairie Bible Institute in Three Hills, Alberta.

By now Jake had come to the deep conviction that his life belonged to God and he was prepared to do the Lord's will as this became plain to him. The atmosphere at Prairie Bible Institute was charged with missionary fervor. Missionary speakers, missionary prayer meetings and mission studies were part of the daily spiritual diet of the student body. Students were constantly challenged to discern God's will for their lives and warned not to settle for God's "second best." This was an emphasis which Jake questioned for he felt that God led people one step at a time and did not give them a "blue-print" for their lives. However, he was deeply stirred by the constant reminder that millions of people all over the world had not yet heard the gospel and he wanted to do his part in proclaiming the

Good News to some unreached people group. With this in mind he wrote to A. E. Janzen, secretary of the Board of Missions of the Mennonite Brethren Church, and offered his services for mission work among the Indian tribes of Paraguay. The Mennonite Brethren at that time had not yet begun their mission to these tribes. Since the Mission Board had no opening for him in this part of the world Jake decided simply to wait for the Lord's timing. He had already had three years of Bible training before he enrolled at Prairie and so with advanced standing he was able to graduate from PBI after two years. Jake always cherished his experience at this interdenominational school.

By the time Jake had graduated from the Coaldale Bible School World War II had begun and it continued to rage while he was at Prairie. Like other young men he was subject to the draft. As a convinced conscientious objector he could have entered an alternate service program of the Canadian government. However, his brother Henry got married and had his own farm and the youngest of the three boys enlisted in the army's Dental Core. That left the Koops with only Jake to help with their farming activities. The Selective Service, therefore, allowed Jake to stay at home and to work on the farm. However, since there was relatively little to do on the farm in the winter months, he was able to attend Bible school during the five winter months. In 1941, after he had graduated from Prairie Bible Institute, he received a call to teach at the La Glace Bible School in northern Alberta.

His colleague in the La Glace school was his former mentor, Abram Schierling, who was known widely for his gift of expounding the Scriptures. Neither Schierling nor Jake were married, so they lived at the Bible school and ate with the students in the dining hall. Helene Janzen, who had grown up in La Glace, cooked for the school that year. Although she was not sure whether Jake ever paid much attention to her (unmarried teachers in our church schools always tried to be extremely circumspect), Jake had secretly taken

a fancy to her. He was, of course, careful not to let her or anyone else know about this growing affection for Helene during the school year. However, when the school year ended and Jake made preparations to return to the farm in Coaldale for the summer, he happened to meet Helene in the kitchen and promptly asked her whether she would be willing to become his life's companion.

Helene was caught completely off guard. She had the highest respect for Jake and she knew how much the students appreciated him as a teacher and a person. In her youthful fancy she had often wished she would find a husband with whom she would be one heart and mind. And now suddenly she was faced with a marriage proposal. Understandably Jake wanted a response before he left La Glace. Helene told him that she would think and pray about this matter first. That night she opened her Bible and her eyes fell on Jeremiah 32:38-42, where God promises his people that he will give them "one heart and one way . . . for their own good and the good of their children." There had been no courtship but Helene was convinced that Jake would make a good husband, and she gave him her Yes.

La Glace was about 800 miles by car from Coaldale and visiting each other was out of the question. However, there was the Canadian postal service and soon the letters began to flow back and forth. In this way Jake and Helene got to know each other more intimately and discovered that they shared similar Christian ideals and goals. Before Jake had left for his first year of teaching at La Glace his brother Henry's father-in-law had somewhat off-handedly remarked that perhaps Jake would find a wife in La Glace. When Jake heard this it irritated him and he expressed the wish that people would mind their own business. But now that prophecy was being fulfilled and Jake had to live it down. So what? He had found the girl of his dream.

That July the Alberta Mennonite Brethren Conference had planned to have its provincial convention in La Glace and since that

would bring a number of Coaldale delegates to this northern community, Jake and Helen decided to have their wedding immediately prior to the conference. That would make it possible for some of Jake's Coaldale friends to be present at the wedding.

For Helen the wedding meant that she would have to say farewell to her family and her La Glace community where she had spent her childhood and youth, had become a believer and had been nurtured by the Mennonite Brethren church in La Glace. But, as Ruth said to Naomi, "Where you go, I will go," Helen had pledged her troth to her new husband and together they made their way to Coaldale. Beside the parental home on the Koop farm stood a much smaller house, and this was to become Jake and Helen's first home. Although the couple was deeply in love, Helen often caught herself using the formal German "Sie" when speaking to Jake. She had yet to learn to address him by the familiar "Du."

While working on the farm that summer, Jake received a call to teach locally at the Coaldale Bible School and he gladly accepted the invitation. His colleagues that year were B. W. Sawatzky, J. A. Toews and John Unger. For two years, 1942-1944, Jake worked hard on his lectures and enjoyed teaching the word of God at the Bible school and preaching the gospel in his home church and other churches in the area. The Coaldale Mennonite Brethren Church appreciated his services, felt convinced that God had called Jake to the gospel ministry, and so decided to ordain him. Under the leadership of B. B. Janz, the ordination service took place in the spring of 1944. By now their eldest daughter, Esther, had been born.

Then came the call back to the La Glace Bible School, and that brought me into closer partnership with Jake and Helen. I had also received an invitation to come to La Glace in the fall of 1944 to teach at the Bible school. La Glace at that time was a sizeable community, although in subsequent years there was a constant exodus to the warmer climate on the west coast. Jake and I had

become friends over the years; we worked together in Daily Vacation Bible School and upon occasion visited Jake and Helen after they settled in Coaldale. And now that we were to be colleagues in the teaching ministry, together with Abram Schierling, we often talked about the coming school year, particularly about the subjects I would be asked to teach. As a novice I was somewhat frightened at the thought of teaching so many hours a week, but with Jake as a colleague I took heart. There was, however, something rather private that I felt I should share with Jake. I was corresponding with Lena Hamm of La Glace at the time and, although we were not engaged and had not even discussed marriage plans concretely, in our hearts we were committed to each other. One day I told Jake that I had a girl-friend in La Glace and I wondered how that would work if I went up there to teach. Who is it? he asked. Lena Hamm, I said. A golden girl, was his response. But, he added, you can not teach in La Glace and be dating a girl; the church would never accept that. What to do? His advice was: either Lena leaves for the school year or you get married before the school year begins. I was taken aback. I wrote to Lena and shared with her Jake's suggestion to see how she would respond. It was not long before she replied. So in August, while on a preaching mission in northern Alberta, I came to La Glace to be engaged. We also agreed that we would get married before the school year began. It was only natural, then, that we should ask Jake to preach the wedding sermon (Lena's father, who was a minister in the La Glace church, married us). And with that began our teaching career, with Jake and Mr. Schierling as associates.

In the course of that year Jake received word from the office of our Mission Board in Hillsboro that they were now prepared to begin a work in the Paraguayan Chaco among the Chulupi Indians. Jake and Helen accepted this call, and that changed the course of their life.

In preparation for learning a new and difficult language, Jake

enrolled in the Summer Institute of Linguistics held at Briercrest that summer with instructors such as Drs. Eugene Nida and Kenneth Pike. In March, 1946, B. B. Janz with a large number of members of the Coaldale church were at the train station to wish them God-speed. Ben and Susie Epp, also of the Coaldale congregation, were on their way to work among the Lengua Indians in Paraguay and traveled together with the Franzes. (The Epps had already been in Paraguay previously.)

They traveled by train to New Orleans and there, after eight days of waiting, finally boarded a freighter, which stopped at ports in Cuba, Brazil, and finally in Montevideo, Uruguay. After spending 35 days on the Jose Menendez (they nicknamed it "Manjan"), they were eager to have solid ground under their feet again. But Montevideo was not their final destination. To get to the Chaco they had to spend another eight days on a river boat as they made their way on the Paraguay River. The Trans-Chaco Highway had not yet been built and so they had to take a slow train as far as it went. The last stage of their journey to Fernheim was completed with horse and buggy.

To be transported from cool Alberta to the Chaco, where the temperature might go up to 46 Celsius, was enervating. At first the family lived in rather humble circumstances—dirt floors, beds without springs, no fridge, no fan, and much of the time without fruits and vegetables. The house had no glass windows since it never got very cold. But anyone who has spent the months of July and August in Paraguay knows how people shiver in the unheated houses during these cooler months.

Mission work among the Lengua tribe had already begun, but the Franzes were to reach the Chulupí Indians for Christ. The Chulupis had been a nomadic tribe but from time to time they settled close to Filadelfia. The Franzes tried to make friends with these primitive inhabitants of the Chaco. Since they had no written language Jake began by building up a vocabulary-recording the

words phonetically. Then came the arduous task of deciphering the structure of a very complex language. Slowly a few Scripture texts and hymns were translated. On their second Christmas in Paraguay the Franzes had prepared small gifts for their Indian friends, but before they could distribute them they had left. Jake followed them all the way to Neuland to give them their gifts and to sing "Silent Night" for them in Chulupí. Bible stories were rendered into their mother tongue and step by step the Scriptures came to life in this strange language. Dr. Reyburn of the Wycliffe Translators spent several weeks with the Franzes giving valuable advice, as did Dr. Nida of the American Bible Society. Later, the Gerhard Heins continued the translation work and today, after fifty years, the entire Bible is available in Chulupí. Jake was not out to build his own little kingdom but drew others into the work and thereby assured continuity in the mission to the Chulupí long after he was gone.

After working for almost six years, there were signs that the gospel was breaking through the darkness of paganism. One day as Jake worked on a Scripture passage with Gregorio, he said, "If this is true, we must all change." But they were not ready for that. Meantime the Franzes left for their first furlough. Two more children had been born to them in the Chaco, James and Eleanor, and so they returned to Canada with three children in 1951.

Helen's parents, the Aaron Janzens, had meantime moved from La Glace to the Fraser Valley and the Franzes lived with them. The Janzens gave up their bedroom and slept on a hide-a-bed in the living room in order to give their missionary children and grandchildren a measure of privacy. Jake and Helen visited different churches in British Columbia reporting on their work in the Chaco, often leaving their children with the grandparents.

Jake was also invited to other provinces for mission conferences. The months sped by and in September, 1952, they were on their way to mission headquarters in Hillsboro. They spent several months here, visiting churches on weekends and taking some

classes at Tabor College. Then it was back to Paraguay.

During the latter part of their furlough the Chulupi had returned and to the pleasant surprise of the missionaries they now seemed open for the gospel. Early and late they came to the Franzes, wanting to confess their sins and to receive salvation. So deeply did the Spirit of God move among them that Jake upon occasion had to ask them to come next day. He was reminded of the gospel text in which it is reported that Jesus "released" the multitude. After another term of some five and half years a great many Chulupis had embraced the gospel were baptized and became members of emerging churches.

On one occasion Jake noticed that Christian Chilupis were sitting around a camp-fire, engaged in what sounded like a dispute. He joined them and discovered that their question was: were those believers who had been baptized by the missionaries at an advantage over those who had been baptized by their Chulupi pastors? Very wisely Jake then asked them whether he had used his own name when he baptized the first converts. Of course not, was their reply; he had baptized them in Jesus' name. And which name did your elders use when they baptized new believers? The name of Jesus! Immediately they saw through the folly of their argument and the meeting ended peacefully.

Conversion to Christ brought about radical changes in the Chulupi manner of life. Earlier they never allowed more than two children per family to survive (the others were killed at birth) since game in the Chaco was too scarce to sustain a larger family. But now they realized that this was an evil practice and so Christians had larger families. That meant that they had to find a new means of livelihood. So A. E. Janzen, the secretary of the Board of Missions, together with Jake found some land on which they could settle and develop simple forms of agriculture so that they could sustain themselves with peanuts, fruits and vegetables. Churches were built, schools were established and medical clinics opened. I was

quite amazed when I visited the Chulupis years later, to see what God by his grace had accomplished in the lives of these people.

Three more children were added to the Franz family during this second term in Paraguay—Ernie and the twins, Kenneth and Karen. After another five and a half years in the Chaco it was time for a second furlough in Canada. It should be added that besides the work among the Chulupi Indians Jake took an active part in the life of the Mennonite churches in Paraguay, frequently preaching the gospel in the Mennonite colonies (Neuland in the Chaco, and Volendam in East Paraguay, were established by refugees from the Soviet Union after the Second World War). Initially, he also taught part time in the Bible school in Filadelfia.

During their second furlough they lived in Clearbrook, B. C. What made their departure for Paraguay for a third term more difficult was the decision to leave their sixteen-year-old daughter, Esther, in Canada for educational reasons. In the Chaco the Franzes continued their mission activities. Then, in 1955, Jake was appointed by the Mission Board to be mission secretary for Paraguay. This meant that he was to guide not only the work among the various Indian tribes but also the Spanish mission to the native Paraguayans. Altogether Jake and Helen spent some twenty-four years in Paraguay.

In 1961 the Mission Board asked the Franzes to move to Asuncion where Jake was given the additional assignment of serving the German speaking Mennonite Brethren church in the capital. He led this congregation for a number of years, although most of the services were held jointly with the General Conference Mennonites. Besides his responsibilities in the church and in the mission, he participated in the establishment of a Bible school in Asuncion (known as the I.B.A.), as well as a Christian day school. In the Chaco the Mennonites had established a mission called *Licht den Indianern*, and Jake repeatedly returned to the Chaco to participate in their meetings. The work which the Franzes had begun was

carried on by Paraguayan Mennonite missionaries.

On their third furlough the Franzes were invited to live in the parsonage of the Greendale Mennonite Brethren Church. Here Jake preached frequently, although he was often on deputation work in other churches. Transportation by now was much better than when they first went to Paraguay. Travel by rail and river boat had been replaced by the airplane. But leaving one child after another in Canada as they returned time and again to Paraguay did not get any easier. Their last term in Asuncion was somewhat shorter than their previous three terms. In 1969, after more than two decades in Paraguay, they returned home to stay.

They settled in Clearbrook and, after carrying out several more assignments for the Board of Missions including a three-month ministry in South America, Jake accepted the invitation by the King Road Mennonite Brethren Church to become their pastor. This congregation had emerged only recently out of the South Abbotsford Mennonite Brethren Church, and many of its members were more recent immigrants from Europe as well as from Brasil and Paraguay and they expected Jake to minister to them primarily in the German language. Occasionally he served other churches of the Canadian Conference at mission conferences.

Jake's ministry was greatly appreciated by the King Road congregation. For the children of the Franzes, however, it was difficult to adjust to the new situation. While in Paraguay the family had begun to use English as their language of conversation so that the children would find it easier to adapt to Canadian culture upon their return, and although they had picked up the German in Paraguay they did not feel quite comfortable in it. King Road had not yet joined the Canadian Mennonite Brethren Conference and Jake had made it clear when he assumed the leadership that he would like the congregation to become part of this denomination. The Franzes meanwhile kept their membership in the Coaldale Mennonite Brethren Church which, in a one sense, always remained

their “home” church. King Road was accepted into the Canadian Conference in 1978 and so the Franzes transferred their membership to the church which they were serving. By now the membership had grown to 300, with twice as many in attendance on Sundays.

The language question did not go away. There were those in the church who did not know English whereas the young people were having difficulty with German. Jake took the initiative in moving the congregation forward in the change from German to English and that brought him a lot of criticism. But Jake had the grace to be a bridge-builder. One of his fellow ministers made the observation that “Franz always puts himself on the same level with you. He never gives you the impression that he doesn’t need you or that he can do it alone.” From 1971 to 1978 Jake faithfully served the King Road congregation as senior pastor. In 1975 Jake and Helen took a four-week holiday during which they organized the South America archives at the mission offices in Hillsboro, Kansas. In 1976 Jake and Helen spent four months ministering in South America. Ben Epp, a former missionary to the Paraguayan Indians, filled in for him at King Road.

Although Jake had enjoyed reasonably good health during his many years in Paraguay, the arduous life of a pioneer missionary had taken its toll. In 1972 he accompanied the leader of the Lengua Indians, who had been asked to visit churches in Canada, as translator. Traveling by bus from one church to the next was hard and while in Hazelton, B. C., he had his first heart attack. He spent some time in the hospital in Prince George but was able to take up his duties in King Road once again.

In June 1978 there were indications of irregularities with his heart. However, Jake and Helen attended the Canadian Conference in Three Hills that July and were glad to see the King Road Church become a member of the Mennonite Brethren Conference. After the Conference they drove north to La Glace to participate in the 50th anniversary of the founding of the church. In August of that year he

officiated at several weddings, besides carrying on his regular pastoral duties. But there were clear signs that he was not well. After an unexpected blackout he spent some time in an intensive care unit. Although he was released shortly thereafter his condition did not improve and he was taken to the Royal Columbian Hospital in new Westminster. Here it was established that he needed bypass surgery, but because there was a waiting list he was sent home. It was obvious, however, that if nothing was done soon he would die. He then developed pneumonia and surgery was out of the question.

All except one of their children were married by now and lived in Manitoba, Alberta and British Columbia. Realizing that their father might pass away any time they came home to see him one last time. Jake had been transferred once again to the Royal Columbian and Helen and the children took their turn at his bedside as his life slowly ebbed away. These last days and hours were very meaningful for the members of his family and they remembered many of his last words. Repeatedly he assured them of his love, told them how good they had been, encouraged them to serve the Lord, and expressed the hope to be together with them some day in the world to come.

He spoke about his death and his funeral without fear and rejoiced in the assurance of the forgiveness of all his sins. Although, as he put it, he would much prefer that the Lord returned immediately so that they could all go to glory together, he realized that the shadow of death was encompassing him. As the bright rays of the sun burst through the window of his hospital room he commented: "But it's even nicer on 'the other side'." He felt sorry for his wife and children for wearing themselves out by sitting at his bedside day and night. Shortly before he passed away he encouraged Helen to go home, have a warm shower, and get a good sleep. But when he said good night to her, he added dolefully, "maybe it's goodbye." On November 25, 1978, he passed into the presence of the Lord whom he had served faithfully right to the end.

To accommodate the crowds who mourned his passing the memorial service was held in the Central Heights Mennonite Brethren Church. Hans Wiens, who had been Jake's co-worker for many years in Paraguay, led the service. Victor Toews, who had also worked in Paraguay for a number of years, gave a message in the German language and Henry G. Klassen, Vancouver, brought a message in English. Words of condolence and comfort were spoken by a number of Conference leaders and the junior and senior choirs of the King Road church sang songs of encouragement and hope. Sons and sons-in-law bore the casket to the grave in the Hazelwood Cemetery where David Wiens, Vancouver, spoke of the living hope of the believer.

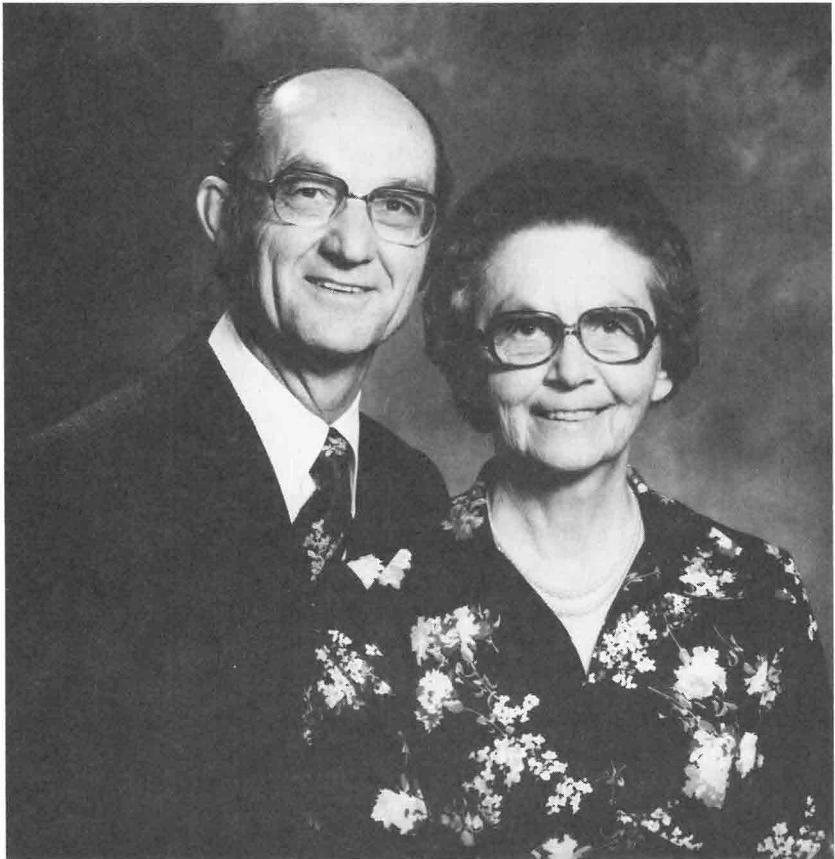
The reception following the burial was at the King Road church at which numerous members of the church, church leaders, colleagues in the ministry and the family gave witness to the grace of God in the life of Jacob Franz. All of them recalled the exemplary life he had lived. Former students of his remembered him as a teacher who was also a friend. Class-mates from earlier school days recalled his friendship. Church members spoke of the deep impression his well-prepared and well-structured sermons had made on their lives. Fellow-ministers and missionaries emphasized Jake's marvelous gift of problem solving. His quiet, unpretentious manner, the humor with which he often broke and his patience with people who made things difficult was appreciated by all who had worked together with him. And when a problem seemed insoluble, he often suggested that they pray and sleep over it. In that way many a crisis was avoided and the resolution came eventually. One word, often found in Anabaptist literature, might best characterize Jake, namely "*Gelassenheit*". This relaxed attitude in the midst of testings came, however, not from indifference but from a deep faith in God into whose hands he had entrusted his life, the life of his family and the work of the Kingdom in which he was engaged.

Family members remember to this day the interest he took in

children, his hospitality, his love for books, particularly for poetry (he often inserted a poem in the church bulletin), his emotional stability, his loyalty to the church and his sanctified common sense. He never strove to accumulate earthly treasures, always lived modestly and contentedly, "poor, but making many rich."

As the news of Jake's death reached Paraguay, messages of condolence and of appreciation for his long ministry in that land began to pour in. The Paraguayan Conference, former co-workers in that land, and, what probably would have thrilled his heart most of all, the Chulupi Indian Conference sent their greeting. Abram Regehr, who lived in the Chaco had several Chulupi families living on his yard. When he heard of Jake's death on the radio he went out immediately to bring them the sad news. There followed a long and profound silence. Then a young man asked: "Why don't they bring him here? We want to weep over him . . . Whatever Jacob Franz told us was good."

Like the godly person of whom the Psalmist spoke, Jake was "like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither."



Jacob H. and Annie (Enns) Quiring

## 7

*JACOB H. QUIRING (1913- )*

Jacob Quiring was born in 1913 in the small country town of Hepburn, Saskatchewan. His parents, Henry and Mary Quiring, were of hardy pioneer stock who were trying to make a home for themselves and their children on the Canadian prairies. His father was born in 1878 in Mountain Lake, Minnesota, a few years after his parents arrived in America from Russia. Henry lost his father at an early age and had to go to work to help the family survive economically. Unfortunately this prevented him from receiving a formal education.

At age 17 Jake's father committed his life to Christ and was received into the Mennonite Brethren Church by baptism. When he was 21 he married Helena Buhler and shortly thereafter the young couple decided to take up a homestead in Saskatchewan. Two daughters were born to them but at the turn of the century both the mother and one of the daughters died. After much sorrow and loneliness Henry found a new wife in Mary Nickel who had come to Canada from Russia in 1902. She was to become the mother of Jacob Quiring. (Today I call him Jake, although in my younger years it was always "Mr. Quiring").

The Quiring family was just one of a number of younger Mennonite farmers who moved to Saskatchewan from Minnesota and Nebraska at the turn of the century and who began to break the prairie sod. The land north of Saskatoon was still dotted with trees and bushes when they arrived. In earlier years the trees provided firewood for the homes and fenceposts for the pasture lands. As time went by the poplars and willows had to give way to the plough.

Pioneer days were extremely difficult and most of these Mennonite families suffered through years of poverty. From Hepburn the Quirings moved to a farm near Dalmeny. The

Canadian National Railway ran through this prairie hamlet. The passenger train delivered mail and transported the farmers' milk to the Palm Dairies in Saskatoon. Freight trains moved the grain from the elevators and brought coal and other supplies for the farmers.

Although living conditions were rather primitive—no running water, no electricity, no radio, no daily newspaper—Jake quite enjoyed farm life. All the children were expected to share in the work on the family farm. They learned how to take care of the cows, the horses, the pigs and the chickens. They were given lessons in gardening and household duties. There was, however, also plenty of leisure time for children to enjoy the great outdoors and to catch gophers and rabbits.

Since all the farmers in the Dalmeny community were Mennonites, belonging either to the Mennonite Brethren or the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Church, there was no conflict between the moral and spiritual standards of the church and of the home. Moreover, it could be assumed that the teachers in the public school which all children attended would uphold these standards as well. The church was not only the religious but also the social center of the Dalmeny farmers. Sunday was always a welcome day. Chores were reduced to the minimum, special foods were served, everyone dressed in their Sunday best.

The country church which the Quirings attended was about four miles from their farm. It was a simple building with little more than pulpit and pews. Beside the church was the cemetery with its tombstones. On one side of the church-yard were long row of horse stalls which became garages when the horse and buggy gave way to the motor car. Going to church was a habit so deeply established that the question of whether the family should go to church or not never came up. Jake did not resent going to church nor did he find church services boring. He learned much from the sermons and enjoyed singing the songs of faith. After the family purchased a Model T touring car even driving to church was

fun.

The daily life of the Quiring family was characterized by godliness. The day began with father leading the family in Bible reading and prayer at the breakfast table. Simplicity, integrity and charity were taught both by precept and example. As one might expect, in a large family things did not always flow smoothly. Quarrels among the children and childhood shenanigans often called for parental discipline. Unfortunately, besides school work and the necessary chores, there wasn't much to occupy active minds on long winter evenings. There was next to nothing to read other than the Bible, the Eatons catalogue and the *Zionsbote*—a German denominational family paper published in Kansas.

At age six Jake enrolled in a typical one-room elementary school north of Dalmeny. The language of the Mennonite families was Low German. In their church services, however, they spoke High German. Jake now had to learn to speak English. By community consensus the hour from 3 to 4 pm was used for the study of the Bible and German. After the family moved to another farm Jake attended school in Mennon. Here he proved to be an outstanding student and at the age of twelve he completed his eighth grade. Unfortunately instead of pursuing high-school studies he dropped out of school. Young people in his community were not encouraged to strive for higher education.

Farming entered Jake's blood. He loved the many facets of farm life. Just being close to nature made farming attractive for him. As a twelve-year-old he ploughed the fields, raked the hay, hauled grain to the elevator and assumed other adult activities on the farm. It was a thrill to drive to town in the Model T Ford to fetch groceries or to be in charge of the threshing machine during harvest season. As time went by the tractor took the place of horses and Jake took a keen interest in the new machinery which was coming onto the market. In 1929 the Great Depression struck and for a decade or so many farmers struggled to survive financially.

Jake was still in elementary school when God began to move deeply in his life leading him to commit his life to Christ. Local preachers tended to stress the sinfulness of the human heart and the need for repentance and conversion. Without faith in Christ, it was underscored, everyone was lost and bound for eternal perdition. Revival meetings when visiting evangelists would invite young people to come to the Savior were held frequently.

At age nine Jake attended one of these revival meetings in a neighboring church and surrendered his life to Christ. The gospel song, "Christ Receiveth Sinful Men," seemed to give him the assurance that Jesus had accepted him as his child. Two years later he again responded to an altar-call when missionary John A. Wiebe conducted services in Dalmeny. Judging by his daily behavior Jake was never quite sure whether he was truly a child of God and at age fourteen he once again committed his life to Christ. On this occasion he went to his father for help and guidance. Although deep peace now came to his heart he still continued to have doubts about his salvation and even after a few years of Bible school he went to see Dr. A. H. Unruh one day to share his doubts with him. Unruh encouraged him to seek assurance of salvation in the promises of God's word and not in his feelings. This helped him to grow in the assurance that he was accepted by God.

Although Jake was certain in his younger years that he would some day be an efficient farmer, God's Spirit was nudging him to consider the ministry of the gospel. He recalls a conversation with a cousin when he was only nine years old in which he ventured to suggest that he might become a preacher some day. Shortly after his conversion Jake began to witness to others about his new-found faith. He even led his younger brother to the Lord. He read the Scriptures and prayed regularly and by baptism became a member of the Dalmeny Mennonite Brethren Church.

Jake was still quite young when he was asked to teach a boy's Sunday school class. He became a member of the church's youth

committee and already at age fifteen was asked to preach a sermon. His father encouraged Jake in these spiritual activities. Preachers did their work gratis and earned their livelihood by farming and sometimes Jake wondered whether he should not also seek to combine these two vocations. But then the words of Jesus rang in his ears, "He who does not forsake father and mother . . . and houses and lands cannot be my disciple." Also, he was encouraged and affirmed by members of the church to heed God's call to the ministry. To instruct others in the word of God, to comfort the sorrowing to warn the wayward and to seek the lost seemed to him to be a most noble calling and in due time this dream would become a reality.

At age fifteen Jake enrolled at the local Dalmeny Bible School. The school had just been established and the course of studies was quite limited and elementary. Jake spent two profitable winters at this school (the school year was only five months long allowing the young people to work on the farms the rest of the year). After two years in the Dalmeny school he decided to go to Winkler where a Bible school had been established in 1925 and where they had a somewhat larger faculty and a more diverse curriculum.

Since he was only seventeen, the Winkler staff was hesitant in granting him permission to enter the third year. In the end, however, he received his acceptance and he immediately took the train for Winkler, Manitoba.

He spent two school years at the Winkler Bible School and enjoyed it immensely. As the youngest in the class he was impressed by the maturity of the students and the ability of the instructors to lead the students into a deeper understanding of the Scriptures. Although it was exciting to be away from home for the first time it did not take long and homesickness began to set in. There was, of course, no thought of going home for Christmas but he kept up regular correspondence with his family in Dalmeny. In the spring of 1932, at the age of eighteen, Jake graduated from the

four-year course of studies of the Winkler Bible School.

During these years of study he had learned how to teach Sunday school lessons and preach sermons. Upon his return to his home community the church made good use of his acquired knowledge and skills. Frequently he was asked to preach. On one occasion he accompanied missionary A. A. Unruh for several weeks on a preaching mission to the churches of northern Saskatchewan. On another occasion Jacob Thiessen, a preacher of some experience and renown who had come from Russia, asked Jake to accompany him on a preaching mission. God's call to the preaching ministry was constantly being re-affirmed.

After graduating from Winkler Jake spent a year at home working on the farm. But then he came to the conclusion that he better finish high school if he was to continue in the teaching/preaching ministry. He had enrolled in Grade 9 the year before he began Bible school in Dalmeny but dropped out when spring work on the farm began. Fortunately he did not have to repeat that grade but was permitted to begin with Grade 10. As a nineteen-year-old he now had to sit with younger students in a one-room school in which one teacher taught all the grades from 9 to 12. Because he proved to be such a good student he was permitted to add a few Grade 11 subjects to his Grade 10 courses. In the following year he took the remainder of Grade 11 and his complete Grade 12. He received his high school diploma that year from the Department of Education. Because of the inconvenience of traveling six miles from the farm to the school every day Jake moved a box-like caboose on wheels close to the school grounds and lived alone in this contraption during these two years of high school. The Depression made life hard for the farmers, money was scarce and so every effort was made to live as frugally as possible. His parents felt badly that they could not do more for their son.

Jake had now completed his high school and had four years of Bible training under his belt. What next? He was twenty-two,

single, and without a job. During this time of uncertainty the Winkler Bible School announced that it would be adding a fifth year of studies to its curriculum. That seemed like an attractive opportunity for more serious study of theological subjects. What Jake did not know was, that this 5th year at Winkler was to open the way for him into the Bible teaching ministry. And more than that, it was during this year in Winkler that he would find his life's companion.

Although relationships between the sexes were rather strictly supervised in Mennonite Brethren churches as well as in their schools, all young people anticipated marriage in due time. Boys were taught to treat girls with respect and courtesy but dating girls at an early age was discouraged, if not strictly forbidden. Jake had never had a steady girlfriend, but at twenty-two he began to think seriously about finding a partner for life. His parents were getting a bit concerned about him and father hinted that perhaps he might find a wife in Manitoba.

Back in Winkler a cousin pointed out a fine Christian girl to Jake and he began eyeing this very attractive young lady. It was Annie Enns, from nearby Kronsgart, who was taking her third year at Winkler. Regulations, however, did not permit visiting between men and women, but the occasional glance was sufficient to suggest the beginning of mutual love and respect. Jake prayed much about this matter but when the school year ended he was still at loose ends. The day he was to leave by train he decided to go to the Bible school once more where the third-year class was cleaning up after the doing banquet. Sure enough, he met Anne at the bottom of the stairs, shook her hand and wished her God's blessing as he said good-bye. Anne's eyes said it all. He left for home on cloud nine carrying with him a small photograph of the girl he loved (a relative evidently had procured it for him).

Shortly after arriving home Jake wrote to Anne asking her to marry him. To his great delight her positive response was not long

in coming.

Letters now began arriving regularly in Dalmeny and in Kronsgart. In spite of the Depression, Jake's parents decided to visit relatives in Manitoba that fall and that gave him the wonderful opportunity to see his fiancee and her parents. He stayed at the Ennses for a few days and asked Anne's parents for permission to marry their daughter, promising always to treat her with love, dignity and respect. The request was gladly granted. Parting was painful but the hope that in due time the marriage would take place encouraged Jake to continue in the ministry of the gospel.

Jake had received a call that summer from the Coaldale Bible School in Alberta to join their teaching staff. Dr. A. H. Unruh had recommended him for this position. The other newly appointed instructor was B. W. Sawatzky, also from Saskatchewan. Before the school year began the former faculty members resigned leaving Jake and Ben Sawatzky to carry the full responsibility. It was at the opening program of the Bible school that year that I, for the first time, saw both Jake and Ben Sawatzky. Jake led the school choir and Sawatzky preached the opening sermon. I was thirteen at the time and felt deeply moved by what I heard and saw. Secretly I hoped that I could some day join such a fine group of young people in the study of the Scriptures.

Since Jake was single he found lodging with an elderly gentleman and took his meals with the Sawatzkys. He found teaching a real challenge and threw himself into it wholeheartedly. The Coaldale Mennonite community in contrast to that of Dalmeny was comprised almost exclusively of immigrants from Russia who had come to Canada in the twenties. There was considerable tension between Mennonites who had come to Canada at the turn of the century and even earlier and these later immigrants. Jake, however, was well received by the Coaldale Mennonite Brethren even though he was Canadian by birth.

Every teacher knows how hard the first year of teaching is. Jake

and Ben Sawatzky had to prepare for and give five or six lectures daily. Besides the classes they took their turn speaking in chapel. On top of that Jake conducted the weekly practices of the school choir. The Coaldale young people did not yet know how to read notes (they sang according to *Ziphern*) and so someone had to transcribe notes into numbers. No pianists were available and Jake had to depend on his tuning fork to get the right pitch. Nevertheless the choir sang the songs of faith with real gusto.

What made that first year of teaching somewhat more bearable was the correspondence Jake carried on with his fiancee and the hope that they would be married the following summer. Jake received \$50 per month that winter in Coaldale. After subtracting expenses not very much was left over. He returned to Dalmeny in spring, where he worked on the farm for Jacob Lepp. By the time Jake packed up to travel to Manitoba for his wedding he had \$95 to his name. The wedding was to take place on June 27 and Manitoba law required him to be in the province fifteen days before the wedding. Anne got him from the bus depot with her parents' car and Jake helped on the farm while wedding preparations were being made. The long awaited day finally arrived and Jake and Anne exchanged their marriage vows in the presence of friends and relatives in the Kronsgart Mennonite Brethren Church. There was no honeymoon; the newlyweds simply stayed with Anne's parents until the harvest was completed. The Ennses then took the young couple by car to Dalmeny and from there Jake's father took them to Coaldale for another year of teaching.

They rented a small two-room house in Coaldale. It was next to impossible to keep it warm during the winter months. For the following three years they were able to rent a somewhat better house located about a mile from the Bible school. Jake always walked to school and also came home for lunch. He taught in Coaldale for five years altogether and has fond memories of students and members of the community. When the Quirings left for good

in the spring of 1941 the church and the students were sorry to see them go. The Bible school employed its teachers for only five months of the year and since Anne's home was in Manitoba they were getting tired of moving back and forth. Jake's father-in-law offered to help him get established as a farmer in the Kronsgart area, but Jake felt that God's call to the ministry did not permit him to return to farming. They had received an invitation to teach at the Dalmeny Bible School and had accepted the call. This meant that they could live in the teacherage year round in Jake's home community.

It was during Jake's last two years at the Coaldale Bible School that I had the privilege of sitting in his classes. He taught us Doctrine, Life of Christ, Personal Evangelism and several courses in Christian Education. I was only sixteen when I first enrolled at the Bible school and we must have tested his patience quite often. I recall two occasions when he called us into the teachers' office to admonish us. On one occasion a desk in the classroom had been knocked over during a recess period and he demanded an explanation for the noise. The other occasion was when we organized a baseball team and soundly beat the local high-school team. He found it hard to understand that Bible school students would engage in such "worldly" activities. I could not have dreamt at that time that I would be his colleague some day at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College.

In the spring of 1941 the Quirings settled into the teacherage provided by the Dalmeny Bible School. Jake was asked to be principal and he worked hard to promote the school but these were the war years and most of the young men were on duty elsewhere. Fourteen miles away was the Bethany Bible School, at Hepburn, which attracted students from a much wider area and had a bigger teaching staff.

For three years Jake devoted his energies to the Dalmeny school. During the summer months he did some deputation and

evangelism, but he also helped out on the farms, particularly in the harvest season. Shortly after the Quirings settled in Dalmeny the church affirmed Jake's calling to the ministry of the gospel by ordaining him. Although the enrollment of the school was small Jake enjoyed his teaching ministry in Dalmeny, as he had in the previous years in Coaldale.

After the Quirings had settled in Dalmeny and established a home for themselves they made their first effort to adopt a child, since it appeared as if they would not have children of their own. But nothing came of it. World War II was raging, and Jake got a call from the recruitment office to appear before a medical examiner. He explained to the recruiting officer that he was an ordained minister and that he was a conscientious objector to war. He never heard another word from the Selective Service and so was able to continue his ministries without interruption during the war years.

During the Dalmeny years Jake began to think seriously of continuing his education. He began with several courses at the university in Saskatoon but eventually decided to leave Dalmeny and enroll at Tabor College, a liberal arts college in Hillsboro, Kansas, operated by Mennonite Brethren. To leave Canada during the war years and to enter the United States was not that simple and called for a considerable amount of documentation—police records, birth certificates, passports, visas and so forth. Finally they were granted a student visa for one year, subject to renewal.

The Quirings sold everything they had including their car and made their way by train to Hillsboro. This year at Tabor College was to become one of the most enjoyable and profitable years of their life. They lived in a one-room apartment on the second floor of a house owned by a kind Adventist couple. Other Canadian couples were at Tabor during that year and so they did not feel lonely. Tabor College was not yet accredited, but the president, Dr. P. E. Schellenberg, was a respected scholar in the field of Psychology and his courses were normally accepted by universities.

Jake decided then to major in Psychology, although he took courses in History, English, German, Philosophy and Economics as well. He earned straight A's in his subjects. More importantly, these subjects opened up new intellectual horizons to him.

After a full year of studies and an added summer session together with liberal transfer credit Jake was able to graduate with his B.A. During the course of the year he had been asked repeatedly to preach in Hillsboro and in other churches in the area. Also, his year at Tabor gave him an opportunity to become familiar with the Mennonite Brethren on the other side of the 49th parallel and many of its leaders.

Before the year at Tabor was over Jake had received four invitations from Canada to teach in Bible schools—Hepburn, Herbert, Winkler and the Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg. It was difficult to decide between Winkler, which was close to Anne's parents, and Winnipeg. In the end the college won out. After leaving Hillsboro Dr. Schellenberg called to let Jake know of a teaching assistantship in Psychology at the University of Kansas with the opportunity to earn an M.A., but they had given MBBC their word and felt they had to honor their commitment. For ten years Jake was to pour his energies into the college program in Winnipeg.

He had hoped to enroll in a Masters program at the University of Manitoba but the registrar informed him that he would have to take another six courses in order to receive his B. A. from the university. He was able to get these courses out of the way in three summer sessions.

Instead of proceeding to a Masters degree Jake decided to earn a Bachelor of Divinity at the local United College. By choosing a non-language degree and receiving considerable transfer credit he was able to complete his requirements for the degree in one year. He graduated in 1949.

When they settled in Winnipeg after their return from Tabor

College, the Quirings found a home about a mile from the college and so Jake always walked to school. Now that they were settled once again they made another attempt at adopting a child. After two years of waiting they were informed by the Child Welfare Department that a baby girl was available. They quickly fell in love with Lois and a year later applied for a baby boy. Meantime the Quirings bought a house on Martin Avenue, closer to college. The house was big enough to allow them to take in roomers.

Cars were hard to come by during the war but by 1949 became available again and Jake was quick to purchase one. Besides teaching at the college he accepted a part time pastoral position at the Christian Fellowship Chapel. Without a car this would have been quite inconvenient. In 1950 the Red River overflowed its banks. College classes were dismissed and every available person worked around the clock to build dykes to protect homes and property. The Quirings were told to vacate their house and so, after moving the furniture to the second floor, they loaded their car and drove to Anne's parents in the country. Although their basement was flooded the house was spared and a few weeks later they were back in their home.

That same year, shortly before Christmas, they got word from the adoption agency that a baby boy was available and the Quirings welcomed Robert into their home and into their hearts. They gave him all the care that parents can give, but as he got older, it was discovered that he was schizophrenic and eventually he had to be institutionalized.

Then the unexpected happened. The doctor confirmed that, after fourteen years of marriage, Anne was pregnant. Only nine months after Robert joined the family Linda was born. With three little ones the family had its hands full. They decided to find a larger house. Instead of buying a house the Quirings purchased a lot from a developer who offered to build a house for them. To Jake's great surprise Anne announced one day, when she was 40 years of age,

that she was pregnant again. To their great delight, Anne gave birth to David who later became a medical doctor.

Jake enjoyed his work at the college both as instructor and as registrar. His main teaching subjects were Psychology and Christian Education. After his first year at MBBC the college decided to publish a theological journal called *The Voice* and Jake was asked to be its editor. J. B. Toews, who was president of the college when Jake joined the faculty, decided to return to the United States, to become the pastor of the Reedley Mennonite Brethren Church. This was a disappointment for Jake. Henry H. Janzen was then asked to assume the leadership of the college. When Janzen left for a year to minister to the refugees in Europe after the war Jake was appointed acting president and he enjoyed this administrative experience. When Janzen returned he relinquished this post.

It was shortly after this, in 1953, that we came to Winnipeg and I joined the faculty of MBBC. Jake was registrar, but since the college did not have a dean in those early years the registrar functioned also in part as academic dean. This gave me many occasions to discuss with him which subjects I would teach as well as other academic matters. In my first year at college I traveled together with Jake to Coaldale where we led in a Bible conference and participated in the graduation of the Bible school. Since he had been my teacher and was ten years my senior I held him in high respect. He, in return, did not treat me as his student but as his colleague and friend.

In 1955, after ten years at MBBC, Jake received an invitation to become the pastor of the Winkler Mennonite Brethren Church and the Quirings decided to leave the city and settle in Winkler. The fact that Anne's parents lived there no doubt was a drawing card. The year in which Jake pastored the Christian Fellowship Chapel had given him a taste for pastoral work. He loved the great variety of opportunities that such a calling afforded—to teach, to counsel, to officiate at weddings, to comfort the sorrowing, to baptize those

who had committed their lives to Christ and to visit the sick. These are the kinds of things a college teacher must forfeit. Moreover, in an academic institution there is a constant turnover of students and although that increases the number of people one gets to know an instructor never stays with students long enough to become friends as does a pastor who walks with people through good times and bad for a long time. Also, Jake was of the persuasion that he would eventually be better able to prepare students for church ministries if he had some years of pastoral experience himself. It was with profound regret that we saw the Quirings leave the college. Their leaving affected me personally, for I was now asked to assume the duties of registrar as well as the editorship of *The Voice*.

The Winkler church presented Jake with some serious challenges. There were divisions and conflicts of long standing in the congregation. One of the tensions had to do with the change of the worship services from German to English. The Winkler church is the oldest church in our Canadian Conference, established in 1888, and some practices were so deeply engrained that they were hard to change. For example, baptisms were still performed in lakes or dugouts even though there was a baptismal in the church building. Some members insisted that regular foot-washing events should take place while others objected. Jake put the emphasis on feeding the flock rather than pushing for radical reforms. Eventually he was able to persuade the congregation to make significant changes without polarizing the membership—a sign of good leadership. He also tried to foster inter-Mennonite relations and to encourage churches in the community to reach out to their unchurched neighbors with the gospel of Christ. He had the joy of baptizing about 100 believers during his ministry in Winkler.

During his seven years as pastor of the Winkler congregation, Jake regularly taught a course or two either at MBBC in Winnipeg or at the Winkler Bible School. And when at the end of these seven years MBBC invited the Quirings back we were delighted when they

accepted the call to return to Winnipeg. During these intervening years J. A. Toews had been president of the college but resigned shortly after Jake re-joined the faculty. Jake did not find the college exactly as it had been when he left seven years earlier. Several new faculty members had been appointed and others had advanced academically. There was a restlessness among students in the sixties that made both teaching and administration somewhat more difficult. Perhaps some of the subjects which Jake was asked to teach (e.g. Psychology and Philosophy) were not his first love. We sensed that it was hard for Jake to get back into the stream of things. A study year between pastorate and college may have helped to make the transition easier. Jake's pastoral interests remained strong and when a group of people from the North Kildonan Mennonite Brethren Church decided to plant a new church in Winnipeg he assumed the leadership of what came to be the River East Mennonite Brethren Church.

When J. A. Toews resigned from the presidency of the college Jake was encouraged to assume the leadership of the school. He took up his new assignment with enthusiasm, particularly in campus development and constituency relations. However, four years after his return to college he felt his time at MBBC was up and he resigned. The college was sad to lose him and some felt that they had not been as supportive as they might have been. His gifts and experience were recognized in all the churches of our denomination. Shortly after Jake resigned from the college he accepted an invitation to become the pastor of the newly formed Bakerview Mennonite Brethren Church in Clearbrook, British Columbia.

After Dr. F. C. Peters left MBBC and became president of what is now Wilfred Laurier University he presented J. H. Quiring as a candidate for an honorary doctorate in recognition of his long service in church and school. At the 1970 spring convocation Jake was awarded the Doctor of Divinity degree. This coincided with the termination of MBBC's affiliation with this university and its

acceptance as an affiliate college of the University of Winnipeg.

For the Quirings the move from Manitoba where they had lived so long to British Columbia was not easy. Their eldest daughter, Lois, had already married and had to be left behind; the others were in their teens and for them it meant being uprooted. On the way to B. C. they stopped in Dalmeny where they said farewell to Jake's aging father. By Christmas in that first year at Bakerview Anne's mother died. Just as she was preparing to fly to Manitoba for the funeral Jake's father also died and he then flew to Saskatchewan to be with his family at the memorial service.

When they moved to B. C. the Quirings lived in rented quarters to begin with, but almost immediately they made plans to have their own house built. In February 1967 they moved into their new house which was to be their home for nearly thirty years.

Jake found his years of pastoral ministry in the Bakerview Mennonite Brethren Church meaningful and rewarding. The congregation was supportive and the membership increased from 173 to 430 during his tenure as pastor. Older members of the church who recall the years when Jake was their spiritual guide cherish pleasant memories of Jake's ministry. One exciting event that interrupted the routine of church work was a three-week trip to Europe and the Holy Land. Jake had been asked to be tour leader and, with a group of thirty, Jake and Anne enjoyed this unique experience to the full.

After nine years at Bakerview Jake felt as if his energies were flagging and decided to relinquish his responsibilities as leader of the congregation. About this time a Bible school was being established in Linz, Austria, and Jake was invited to be an instructor at this school. With his fluency in German and his interest in Europe it was not hard to accept the call and for three school terms they helped in the training of young people for Christian life and service. In order to keep contact with their family they regularly returned home for the summer months.

The Quirings were now of retirement age, but that did not mean that they had to withdraw from service in the kingdom of God. Upon their return, the Killarney Park Mennonite Brethren Church in Vancouver asked Jake to be their pastor on a part-time basis. For two years Jake faithfully proclaimed the word of God in this congregation. I was teaching at the seminary in Fresno and it was my privilege to serve the Killarney Park congregation with a series of expository messages during this time.

Although Killarney Park would have wanted Jake to continue as full time pastor he had resolved that he would no longer carry the full responsibility of pastor. Almost immediately after completing his assignment at Killarney Park Jake was invited to serve for a year as interim pastor in the Kelowna Mennonite Brethren Church. What made this call somewhat more attractive was the fact that their daughter Linda lived in Kelowna with her husband, Don Falk, and their children. They did not know that before the end of that year their daughter Linda would be taken from them by cancer. Neither a liver transplant nor chemotherapy seemed to help. The Quirings were called upon to walk with their children and grandchildren through a deep valley of suffering. It was hard for them to live with the inscrutable ways of God and accept the profound mysteries of his sovereignty.

Although the pain of losing their daughter persisted, a few months after returning to Clearbrook the Bakerview church found itself without a pastor and asked Jake to fill in for half a year until the new pastor could take over. Before assuming his responsibilities at the beginning of January, 1982, Jake shared with the congregation their traumatic experiences of the previous year and this undoubtedly contributed to the healing process. All three interim-pastorates proved to be quite enjoyable for the Quirings and the congregations also felt enriched by their ministry. As he approached his seventieth year Jake came to the conclusion that his public ministry was completed, even though he still preached the

occasional sermon when called upon. Others felt he was still able and strong enough to have continued in pastoral work a little longer, but there are some decisions in life which must be left up to the individual and his or her God. Today, at age 84 and in anticipation of their sixtieth wedding anniversary, the Quirings can look back upon an unusually long life of service in the church of Jesus Christ.

It is quite impossible in a brief sketch of such a long life to mention the numerous interesting details that make up a person's everyday existence here on earth. There are, however, some aspects of Jake's ministry that should not be left unmentioned. We have already referred to his gift of leadership in schools and churches. What must not go unnoticed is his active participation in denominational affairs. From 1948 to 1977, a period of twenty-nine years, he was continuously involved in one Conference board or another.

In 1948, when Canada still supported Tabor College, he was elected to the Tabor College board. In the Manitoba provincial Conference he was on the Home Missions Committee, the Ministers and Deacons Committee and on the Committee of Reference and Counsel. He was both moderator and assistant moderator of the Manitoba Conference. In the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren he served on the Board of Publications, the Board of Higher Education, and the Board of Spiritual and Social Concerns. He was also both assistant moderator and moderator of the Canadian Conference. On the General Conference level, he served for two six-year terms on the Board of Reference and Counsel. After settling in British Columbia he served both as assistant moderator and as moderator of the B. C. Conference of Mennonite Brethren. People appreciated the relaxed manner in which he chaired the sessions and the humor he injected into the serious discussions. At times he was tempted to be a bit sarcastic, but he usually kept himself in check.

As a preacher of the gospel he was highly respected. He had a

good command of both the English and the German languages and spoke both of them fluently. Although people may have got the impression that he spoke off the cuff because of his rather free style of delivery, the fact was that he worked hard in the preparation of his sermons. He had learned to structure his sermons in such a way that the listeners could easily follow from Mr. John Wiens, Homiletics teacher in the Winkler Bible School. His illustrations were usually taken from his own observations and experiences and were of the kind his audiences could easily relate to. He abhorred the "canned" illustrations which were gleaned from books of sermon illustrations. Although in his earlier years he frequently preached evangelistic sermons, in his pastoral ministry he concentrated on the life of the believers. He was always concerned that his messages met the needs of his hearers.

For much of his life Jake wore two hats, that of the preacher and of the teacher. His years of service in the Mennonite Brethren denomination are divided almost equally between teaching in denominational schools and the pastoral ministry in several churches. I got to know him first as teacher, but we also enjoyed listening to him when he was asked to preach the sermon in the Sunday morning worship services in the Coaldale Mennonite Brethren Church. He always prepared well for his class lectures, although he also had the gift of speaking extemporaneously. I do not recall that he ever lectured from a manuscript; usually he had only a more or less detailed outline before him. This made for good audience rapport, but could also lead into unanticipated digressions. With his native wit and humor he had no difficulty in holding the attention of students. Had he pursued graduate studies in the biblical, theological or historical field, he might have become an outstanding seminary teacher. But, like some other servants of the church whose story is told in this volume, he too was a child of his times.

As a practical theologian he might have made an important

contribution to the life of the church through publication, but evidently he did not feel called to this ministry. He did, however, record the story of his life in the form of letters to his children. Also, a 100-page manuscript under the title, "The Mennonite Brethren Church and I," represents his recollections, observations and evaluations of the Mennonite Brethren denomination. In a shorter manuscript entitled, "Nostalgia", he reminisces on his childhood and youth. Over the years he did contribute numerous articles to our denominational papers.

In anticipation of their sixtieth wedding anniversary in the summer of 1997, Jake wrote the story of his and Anne's life together under the topic, "Two Are Better 'Than One'". These words, taken from Ecclesiastes 4:9, were A. A. Kroeker's sermon title at their wedding in 1937. This short manuscript confirms what we always knew, namely, the loving relationship between Jake and his wife Anne. The promise which he gave Mr. Enns, his father-in-law, that he would take good care of his daughter and treat her kindly, has been kept. What made their life together easier was the fact that they were cut more or less from the same cloth. Both grew up on the farm, valued hard work, learned to be frugal and had similar ethical and spiritual values. Above all they shared the same faith and both were committed to the service of Christ and his kingdom.

The joys of married life were tempered by heartaches and pain, however, as is the case in most families. For many years they were childless and when, after adopting two children, they almost immediately had two of their own the challenge of bringing up four little ones was at times a bit overwhelming. As we watched from the side-lines we were often amazed at the patience and kindness with which they treated their children. Although they found much joy in the growth and development of their children, there were also disappointments. The deterioration of their son Robert's mental condition and the death of their daughter Linda, at the age of 29,

caused them much pain. However, with a deep confidence in God and love for each other, they weathered the many storms of life.

Now in their mid-eighties they can look back on a long and rewarding life of service to the church. Although Jake is quite critical about some aspects of modern church life, he loves the people of God. As one might expect of an older Christian who has been part of the believing community all his life, he misses some of the church practices and emphases which nurtured his soul in his youth. Although he adapted to more changes in his life than those who belong to the present generation he is not convinced that all innovations have been for the church's good. It pains him particularly to find so little appreciation on the part of some of our leaders for our Anabaptist-Mennonite heritage. But it is always a joy to visit with Jake. When he is with friends he permits his active mind to raise an endless number of questions and even doubts without inhibition. In public, however, his voice is seldom heard anymore.

Reflecting on the goodness of God in his long life, Jake wrote a prayer of which the following lines are excerpts:

"Gracious God and heavenly Father! You formed my body in the deep darkness of my mother's womb. I could not have survived without the tender, loving care of my parents whose compassionate concern provided nourishment, protection and discipline. You allowed me to develop into a social being, integrated into the larger human family. Through your Holy Spirit you brought me into a living fellowship with you. You enabled me to minister to others with joy and devotion. You gave me a life's companion in Anne, whose love and devotion has never wavered and whose true worth has not yet been fully perceived and acknowledged. You gave us children of your choice to grace our marriage, to love and to pass on to them the great heritage of the past and to share with them our knowledge of you. You provided for our material and spiritual needs, you

comforted us in sorrow, protected us in danger, strengthened us in weakness, restored us after defeat. I also want to accept with gratitude all the days you have written in your book for me and use them wisely, be they many or few. Let me continue to be a contributing member of society and not become a burden to family and friends. Keep me also from the hour of loneliness and despair. May the beacon of faith and hope illumine my pathway up to journey's end, and grant me a joyful and triumphant entry into your eternal kingdom. Amen!"



Frank C. and Melita (Krause) Peters

## 8

*FRANK C. PETERS (1920-1987)*

Frank Peters was born July 5, 1920, the fifth child of Cornelius and Katherine Peters. The Peters family lived in Ekaterinovka, one of the Ignatyevo villages in the Ukraine. Only a few weeks after Frank was born his mother died. She had suffered from heart trouble for some time and died in her sleep with Frank in his cradle beside her bed. The care of the motherless infant now fell to his older sister, Justina. It was a sad and difficult time for the Peters family.

Frank's father, now a widower, was a teacher by profession. He soon realized that to carry on with his professional responsibilities and to care for a family of five motherless children was more than he could manage. And so, after a time of grieving over the passing of his beloved wife, he decided to look for a new marriage partner. Anna Reimer, who lived in the community, was willing to become the new wife of Cornelius Peters and the mother of his children. Out of this union one more child, Anna, was born. (She later married Dr. Peter Bargen and passed away in 1997.)

Leninist Russia in the early twenties did not hold out a bright future for the Mennonite colonies. After the Revolution of 1917, the civil war and the famine in the early twenties, the prospect of continuing in his calling as a Christian teacher was rather bleak as atheism became the dominant ideology of the Soviet Union. Also, the economic policies of the Soviets left the Mennonites in Russia with little hope of material prosperity in the future. In 1924 the Peters family, like thousands of Mennonites, decided to leave their Ukrainian homeland and emigrate to Canada.

Near Langham, Saskatchewan, lived a relative, Johann Peters, who welcomed the family to their new country. It was summer when the Peters arrived and both parents and children did whatever

they could to help their kind hosts in their farming operations. After the harvest was completed the Peters family moved to Langham, for it was time for Frank's three older brothers to begin public school in Canada. Justina, however, did housework in various homes in the community. About a year after the Peters arrived in Canada they moved to Davidson, Saskatchewan, where Cornelius tried his hand at farming but with little success.

Herbert, Saskatchewan, was an important Mennonite center. A number of Mennonite families who had left Russia in the late eighteen hundred's had settled here and played host to many of the immigrants from Russia in the twenties. In 1926, two years after arriving in Canada, the Peters family moved to Herbert. That was also the year in which the Ewert family arrived in Herbert. Mennonite churches in the area soon realized that C. C. Peters had great gifts or teaching and preaching and soon he was asked to become what we might call a "circuit" preacher (*Reiseprediger*).

By now it was time for young Frank to begin school. Like most other immigrant families the Peters were extremely poor. Frank never forgot that he wore girls' shoes when he enrolled in grade one. Justina earned nine dollars a month doing housework in the community but felt it was her filial duty to give all her earnings to the parents, who needed every penny they could get to put bread on the table.

As the Great Depression exacerbated the poverty of immigrants living in the prairie provinces, Canada's west coast appeared to offer hopes of a better life to many of them. In the early thirties the Peters family packed up and made their way across the Rockies to the lush Fraser Valley. They first settled in Aggasiz and here Frank completed several more grades of school. However, before he could complete his highschool, the family moved again.

At seventeen years of age Frank, like his older brothers, decided to strike out on his own to see if he could earn some extra money. Justina, the oldest in the family, had meantime married Martin

Durksen. They lived in Foam Lake, Saskatchewan. Eventually both Frank and his older brother, Peter, also went to Foam Lake to work for farmers in the community and to earn some money. For a while Frank worked also in Mr. Barkman's flour mill.

When he left home Frank did not know, that God's Spirit was pursuing him. Although he had grown up in a Christian home he had not yet committed his life to Christ. In fact he had developed considerable resistance to the gospel. But God's hour had struck. Revival fires were burning in the Foam Lake Mennonite Brethren church. Martin Durksen, their brother-in-law, took both Peter and Frank to the evangelistic meetings. After a fierce inner struggle, Frank finally yielded to the call of God in the gospel and surrendered his life to Christ. Shortly after his conversion he declared his faith publicly in baptism and became a member of the Mennonite Brethren Church—a church to which he remained true all his life.

Almost immediately after becoming a Christian Frank felt drawn to the proclamation of the gospel. Klaus Barkman, in whose mill Frank worked, had promised God that if Frank would become a follower of Jesus, he would bear the expenses if Frank enrolled at the Bethany Bible School. Frank was happy to spend a year in Hepburn, becoming more firmly rooted in the Scriptures. By now his father, C.C. Peters, had been appointed as teacher in the Bible school established n Yarrow, B. C. It was time to come home.

When Bible school opened in fall Frank took his second year of biblical studies in the Yarrow school. The move back to British Columbia proved to be momentous. Melita Krause was his fellow-student during that year. Before long it was obvious that Frank and Melita were deeply in love, although dating was considered unseemly by many Mennonite churches. But love can be quite inventive and so there were many "chance" meetings, not to mention the more inobtrusive manner of communicating by letter.

In 1939 Canada declared war on Germany and, like many other

Mennonite young men, Frank was opposed to military service and chose to register as a "conscientious objector". The Canadian government established camps in different parts of the country where Mennonites and other pacifists could perform alternative services. For Frank this meant planting trees and building roads on Vancouver Island. (Those small trees, planted by conscientious objectors, have since become a stately forest of valuable timber.) Ministers from the various branches of Mennonites made pastoral visits to these camps from time to time. One visitor who was greatly appreciated by the boys in the camps was J. A. Toews. Not all visiting ministers were kindly received by the young men in Campbell River. In fact Frank, together with others of like persuasion, sent a petition to Mennonite church leaders insisting that they wanted only such ministers to visit them who knew English (the boys called one visiting minister "Reverend By Gosh" because that was the only word of English he knew) and, above all, who had been genuinely converted to Christ.

Since no one knew how long the war would last Frank and Melita decided to get married. Long engagements were frowned upon in some Mennonite churches at the time. Frank got leave from camp to travel to Yarrow for his wedding to Melita Krause on August 15, 1943. The wedding took place in the Yarrow Mennonite Brethren Church. Frank's father, C. C. Peters, and Johann Harder, the leader of the church, preached the wedding sermons in which the young couple received instruction and encouragement for their life together as followers of Jesus. Since Frank had to return to his work-camp immediately the newlyweds had their brief honeymoon on the ferry back to Campbell River.

Melita got a job working in the kitchen of the Campbell River Hospital. Their home was a small cabin nearby. Frank had to live at his work-camp, about twenty miles away and came to see Melita at the Denby Cabins whenever he had time off. A little better than a year after their marriage their first son, Robert James, was born.

A year after that their second son, Edward Allan, came upon the scene. It seemed a bit ironic, for Melita had shed some tears because the physician, who examined her before their marriage, predicted that she would probably never have children.

It was now 1945 and the war was coming to an end. Frank had long looked forward to the day when he could resume his studies again. With very limited finances (they sold their new bedroom suite—Melita's wedding gift from her parents) they decided to move to Hillsboro, Kansas, where Frank enrolled at Tabor College. By the time they arrived the second semester had already begun. Frank found work at a creamery where he worked the night shift to pay expenses and attended classes during the day.

In the course of finding living quarters in Hillsboro Frank heard that the Steinreich Mennonite Brethren Church, about eighteen miles out of Hillsboro, was looking for a pastor. Here was a golden opportunity for Frank to exercise his gift of preaching and to augment their meager income. Since the Peters had no car the Steinreich church provided them with a vehicle. On one of their many trips to and from church Robert fell out of the car and had to be rushed to the hospital. Fortunately he sustained no permanent injuries. The Steinreich people fell in love with their young pastor couple and supplied them with meat, eggs and vegetables. It was also in this congregation that Frank was ordained to the gospel ministry.

Frank concentrated most of his energies on his studies and with some transfer credit completed the requirements for his B. A. in short order. After that he commuted to Emporia State Teachers' College and earned his M. Sc. in 1948. Shortly before completing his masters degree their third son, Gerald Franklin, was born.

Frank had hoped to move directly into a Ph.D. program of studies when suddenly Melita received notice from the United States Immigration Department that she would have to leave the country within six weeks. Although the reason for this order was

inexplicable, this meant that the entire family would have to return to Canada. Reluctantly they returned to Yarrow, B. C., where the economy was in a slump and jobs were hard to come by. Without an income Peters had to take out a small loan to feed his family. This was a difficult and depressing chapter in the life of Frank and Melita. To add insult to injury some people teased Frank about earning academic degrees in order to cut grass for farmers. Frank finally left for Vancouver where his brother Peter and his wife lived and found a job in the fishing industry.

With the approach of autumn and the opening of schools, light appeared at the end of the tunnel. Frank was hired by the board of the Yarrow Bible School to teach for one year. During the course of the school year Cornelius J. Rempel visited Yarrow on behalf of the Mennonite Central Committee and discovered that Frank might be interested in a pastoral position. The Kitchener Mennonite Brethren Church was looking for a senior pastor. Rempel returned to Kitchener and before long Frank received an invitation to come to Kitchener for a weekend visit and to preach in the church. The church responded favorably to Frank's ministry and so in 1949, when the Bible school year in Yarrow ended, the family made its way to Ontario to begin a new chapter in their lives.

The church had rented living quarters for the Peters and generously supplied the family with the necessities of life.. After the church built a new parsonage the family moved into more permanent quarters. A year after they arrived in Kitchener their daughter, Marianne Joyce, was born. Frank enjoyed his pastoral ministry immensely but he also continued to upgrade his academic credentials. In 1952 he received a Bachelor of Divinity degree from the Waterloo Lutheran Seminary and later a Master of Theology from the Federated Faculty in Toronto. Waterloo College also appointed Frank as lecturer.

Quite unexpectedly, in 1954, Frank got a call from Tabor College asking him to become the president of the college following

the death of president Hiebert. This meant uprooting the family once again, but it also promised to open new doors of service and further study, and so Frank accepted the invitation. After the family had settled in Hillsboro their younger son, John Wesley, was born. With four sons and one daughter the family was now complete.

Almost from the beginning of his presidency Frank sensed that he did not have the full support of the college faculty. Older and more experienced professors did not all take kindly to a 34-year-old president. Moreover, the fact that a Canadian had been asked to head up an American school did not sit well with some of the staff members. Even though Frank tried to fulfill his obligations to the best of his abilities he soon came to the conviction that he would be a short-term president. Frank suffered emotionally from this experience in administration and for years afterwards found it difficult to return to Hillsboro. After two years at Tabor College, he resigned.

Meantime Frank had begun to work on his Doctor of Theology degree at the Central Baptist Seminary in Kansas City. While still in Hillsboro after leaving Tabor College, the superintendent of the Evangelical United Brethren Church in Kansas invited Frank to pastor two small country churches near Lawrence, Kansas. Preaching in these two churches not only provided the family with a source of income and a place to live, but it also allowed Frank to enrol in a Ph.D. program at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, Kansas.

It was during this time that the Peters discovered to their great dismay that their ten-year-old son, Gerald, had diabetes. They had taken Gerald to the doctor, who mis-diagnosed his illness and gave him a sugar solution. When Gerald went into a coma another doctor was called and he immediately established that Gerald had diabetes. He had to stay in the hospital for a month. This near-death experience brought Gerald closer to God.

But then came the hospital bills. The family had no insurance.

With their meager income they scraped the bottom of the barrel every month. But God in his mercy intervened. Through the generosity of the doctor and the church community the debt was completely liquidated.

Frank had completed his residence work and had passed his comprehensive exams for his Ph.D. in Psychology when he received a call to join the faculty of the Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg.

Frank would have preferred to write his dissertation before he took on a new assignment, but he found the prospect of a teaching position in Canada too attractive. Since by now he had considerable training in two disciplines, theology and psychology, the college was glad when he accepted the invitation. After making his decision he began to waver and wrote to the college president, Dr. J. A. Toews, that he was hesitant to come if the college's offerings in the area of the Liberal Arts were not expanded. President Toews took counsel with the faculty and we decided (I had by then been on the faculty for several years) that we should let Frank know that we would like him to work together with us in the development of our curriculum. That satisfied him and in 1957 the Peters family moved to Winnipeg.

As one might suspect, they came with empty pockets. They needed living quarters—something the college did not supply. Mr. C.A. De Fehr offered them a loan to make a down payment on a house with the understanding that they pay back the money as they were able. The salaries at MBBC were rather low and with five children it was often difficult to make ends meet. They wanted to give their children the opportunity to attend the Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute and that meant paying extra tuition. Frank encouraged Melita to go into public school teaching in order to help with the needs of the family. And so she took teachers training and taught for two years. But it was difficult to carry on a full-time job and take care of a large family. Frank was able to supplement his college salary by taking on a great many weekend preaching

assignments for which he was remunerated by the churches. Although this often drained Frank's energies it was good public relations for the college. Several of Frank's colleagues also spoke frequently in the churches across the land and this drew students from all over Canada to MBBC. It was my privilege to share in a number of Bible conferences with Dr. Peters—always an enjoyable venture.

For eight years Frank devoted himself to the training of young people for church ministries at MBBC. He taught not only Psychology but also biblical and theological subjects. The students enjoyed his classes. In fact his classes were so popular that other faculty members upon occasion suggested that I as registrar not put their subjects into the same time-slot as those of Peters. Frank was a great colleague; we enjoyed his company; he was fun to be with. His sense of humor was contagious.

Frank enjoyed playing innocent pranks on colleagues and students. We sent each other notes, commended and criticized each other, tossed ideas around at faculty meetings and prayed together. Not only did he laugh with us at the comical aspects of life in society, at college and in our churches but he also cried easily when faced with the tragic side of our human existence.

Having lived in the United States for a number of years, Frank brought several customs with him which were new to the more stolid MBBC staff. Among other things he introduced the coffee break and it did not take long for faculty members to appreciate the opportunity to meet casually with other colleagues around a cup of coffee. Also, he called us by our first names. That just was not done at MBBC; even students were encouraged to address each other with Mr. or Miss, brother or sister. For some of us this innovation was somewhat harder to accept since several of our senior colleagues had been our respected teachers at one time. For me to call J.H. Quiring or J. A. Toews by their first names was asking for too much.

When Frank was called to MBBC he made it clear to the administration that he would have nothing to do with administration; all he wanted to do was teach. Besides, he still had his Ph.D. dissertation to complete and defend and that had to be done on top of a regular teaching load. Moreover, as any college teacher knows, regardless of a person's educational background every subject demands a new set of lecture notes and Frank taught most of his subjects for the first time. In retrospect one wonders how he managed to prepare for his classes, work on his thesis and preach almost weekly in one of our churches. He had an amazing capacity for work, although students thought he was not always as well prepared for Monday's classes as he might have been. But no one complained.

Once Frank had established himself as a gifted teacher, president J. A. Toews drew him into the administration of the college. For about a dozen years since its founding MBBC had operated without an academic dean; the president and the registrar shared this administrative function. Toews then suggested that we establish a new position and Frank became MBBC's first academic dean.

As Frank became better known in the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren he not only received numerous invitations to preach in our congregations but his leadership abilities also came to be recognized. Before long he was elected as moderator of the Canadian Conference and eventually as moderator of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches of Canada and the United States. It was my privilege to work together with him in the Board of Reference and Counsel. Together we worked on a revision of our Confession of Faith, opened up membership in our churches to believers who had been baptized by another mode than immersion and dealt with numerous other theological and ethical issues. Frank helped our churches in the process of making changes without losing their biblical moorings. And with his training in Psychology and Counseling, he was also able to be of help to

numerous individuals for whom the battles of life had become too heavy.

I was editor of the college publication "The Voice" during the eight years that Frank taught at MBBC, and I was always pleased with the articles he submitted for publication. Since it was expected of all faculty members to make regular contributions to this theological bimonthly, the journal turned out to be a training-ground for writers. Not all teachers developed the gift of writing, but Frank certainly did. We had always hoped that he would some day produce major book manuscripts for publication, but Frank could not turn down invitations to preach or to teach and so, unfortunately, he has not left us a legacy in the area of publications.

Frank preached well. Like his father he was endowed with a strong, clear voice. His training in homiletics demanded that his sermons always be well structured. If there was a firstly, there was always a secondly; if there was an "A" there must also be a "B". This enabled the listeners to follow more easily as he developed his main topic. Moreover, he was convinced that expository preaching in which a text is analyzed and expounded led to a deeper knowledge of the Christian faith. Although he enjoyed counseling fellow-believers he was of the opinion that if good biblical teaching was done in the pulpit there would always be less need for individual counseling. He laced his sermons with striking illustrations, often quite humorous, but avoided jokes that had no relation to the message from God's word. At times his emotions got the better of him and he preached with tears in his eyes. Contrary to Mennonite Brethren practice at that time Frank preached from a handwritten manuscript. He claimed that handwritten notes were better visual aids than the type-written kind.

Like most of the other faculty members in the fifties, Frank was bilingual and often preached in German. On one occasion when he preached among Old Colony Mennonites in the Swift Current area he resorted to Low German which greatly pleased his audience.

Although he was well educated, he could preach in simple prose and this gave him open doors to some Mennonite groups who were suspicious of higher education. On one occasion when he preached to Old Colony Mennonites one of his listeners expressed his appreciation in these words: "We love to hear you preach, Peters, because you're not as learned as some of those other preachers." Frank loved to tell that story.

Indeed he enjoyed telling embarrassing stories about himself. Once when the family decided to drive east to Ontario for a visit, Frank suddenly noticed that they were passing through Portage La Prairie, about an hour's drive west of Winnipeg. When Frank led a tour group to Palestine in 1953 (my father-in-law was in the group), he did not want to be bothered with much extra clothing. By the time they had toured Israel his clothes were badly in need of cleaning. As they arrived in their hotel in Athens he saw a sign: "Clothes cleaned while you wait." He gave an attendant his clothes to clean while he took a bath. He bathed and bathed but could not go anywhere without clothes. After what seemed an eternity he finally got his clothes. When he got home he told his children the story and his son Gerald promptly wrote an essay in English class with the title: "In Greece without Pants." Peters always surmized that the rest of us also had embarrassing experiences but that we were too afraid (or proud) to talk about them.

Frank admitted later that his eight years at MBBC had been the highlight of his life. But in 1965 he accepted a call back to the Kitchener Mennonite Brethren Church and a teaching position at what became Sir Wilfred Laurier University in Waterloo. The four eldest children all graduated from this school; John, the youngest, graduated in medicine from the University of Toronto.

Only a year after returning to Kitchener the university asked Frank to become its president. The university assured Frank that he could do all the preaching he wanted if only he would assume the presidency. Frank rose to the challenge and became an

exceptionally good administrator. When he retired the university named a building after him. Frank had been instrumental in the affiliation of MBBC with Waterloo College so that our students received full university credit for courses taken at MBBC. Now that he was president of the university he alerted us to the fact that out-of-the-province affiliations would eventually come to an end and it was in part due to his prodding that MBBC then affiliated with the University of Winnipeg.

By the time Frank resigned as president of the university he no longer served as pastor of the Kitchener Mennonite Brethren Church and so, beginning in 1978, Frank extended his preaching and teaching ministry far beyond the Mennonite fold. Already during his years of teaching at MBBC and Waterloo he visited the mission fields of the Mennonite Brethren in a number of countries. Later he became a member as well as chairman of our Board of Missions. But he was also a member of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada and in his so-called retirement years preached also in countries such as the Philippines where the Mennonite Brethren have no churches.

However, he always felt drawn back to the churches of his own denomination and in 1980 accepted a call to pastor the Portage Avenue Mennonite Brethren Church in Winnipeg. The children were grown up by now and so the move back to Winnipeg was not complicated. They rented an apartment in a high-rise and got reacquainted with the Winnipeg community. For three years Frank had the joy of teaching and preaching the Word of God and counseling members of this congregation. We had meantime spent ten years teaching in the United States and when we returned to Winnipeg in 1982 it was a joy for me to meet my former colleague once again on familiar turf.

Following their return to Kitchener, Frank continued to serve both at home and abroad. He taught classes at Emmanuel Bible College in Kitchener. The children were married by now and Frank and Melita made a special effort to remain in contact with them.

Since Frank was an early riser his phone calls to his children often reached them when they were still in bed. At his funeral the grandchildren had hilarious stories to tell about grandpa's phone-calls.

Frank and Melita had the joy of seeing all of their children accept the gospel and all of them have been active in the life of the church in one way or another. When they were younger Frank would often take the family out for lunch on Sundays; of course he placed a limit on what the children could order. To take his family for car rides gave Frank much pleasure. One of Frank's earthly joys was cars, particularly the kind that had "added features." When he bought a car he would take it round to where his children lived to show it off, only to be told that it lacked "certain features"—an error he would vow to correct next time round.

At 67 years of age Frank was still carrying a full load of speaking engagements. In the spring of 1987 he and Melita traveled to Lake Louise, Alberta, where Frank together with Philip Yancey, spoke at the Christian Medical Convention. When the children were still at home Melita usually stayed at home while Frank went on preaching assignments; later she often went with him as he traveled to Africa, South America and Asia. Frank gave much of the credit for his world-wide ministry to Melita, who had been so supportive throughout his years of service in churches and schools and missions.

During the later years of his life when Frank served a world-wide community, some of us wondered at times whether he had forgotten his own denomination. Some people even wondered whether he had become disillusioned with the Mennonite Brethren and that he found greater acceptance outside of his denomination (not an uncommon phenomenon).

When he turned up at the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren in the summer of 1987 held at the Central Heights MB Church in Abbotsford and permitted his name to stand once again

for the Board of Reference and Counsel (now called "Board of Faith and Life"), we were delighted. Since I was then a member of that board, I looked forward to another few years of working together. But God's ways were different and higher than ours.

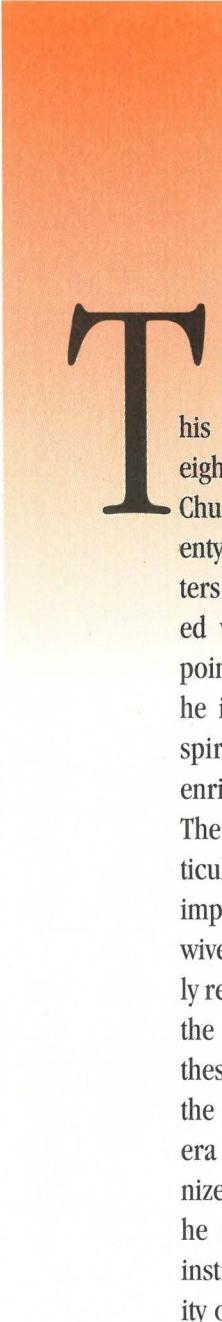
In September, 1987, Frank flew to Blaine, Washington, for what turned out to be his last preaching trip. Melita was at the Toronto Airport to pick him up on his return. As they waited for his luggage he told Melita all about his trip, as was his custom. But he looked rather tired. On the way home to Kitchener Frank had a severe heart attack. Melita took over the driving and raced to the hospital. Their son John was with him in the intensive care unit. Frank held Melita's hand and said, "I don't want to lose you." He was in the hospital for two weeks and the family had high hopes that he might recover completely. But it was not to be.

Frank and Melita had just recently purchased a condominium in which they planned to live during their retirement years, but they had not moved yet. Son John and his wife Becky asked their parents to stay with them for a while. The night before Frank passed away Becky prepared a big dinner. After the meal the family listened to Frank as he told them the story of his life. Next morning, after his bath, he lay down on the bed and slipped away to be with the Christ whom he had tried to serve faithfully all his life.

The funeral was held in the Kitchener Mennonite Brethren Church on October 10, 1987. Pastor John Wall was in charge. In order to prevent overcrowding at the memorial service Wilfred Laurier University had agreed to have the service video-taped and shown on a screen at the university. The congregation sang several of Frank's favorite hymns and members of the Board of Missions and representatives of various schools and Christian organizations attended the memorial service. It was my privilege to represent the Board of Reference and Counsel as well as MBBC. A number of us gave brief messages of condolences to the family and expressed appreciation for the life and service of our co-worker in

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the gospel. For an epitaph on his gravestone Melita chose the verse from Philippians 1:21, “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”



**T**his volume consists of the biographies of eight leaders in the Mennonite Brethren Church during the past approximately seventy years. They were Bible teachers, ministers and missionaries whose lives intersected with the life of the author at various points. David Ewert tells their story because he is convinced that they have left a rich spiritual legacy which can inspire and enrich the lives of the present generation. The stories are not only stories of the particular individuals, however. Interlaced are important elements of the stories of the wives and children who were not adequately recognized for their role in the ministry of the men. Furthermore, the biographies of these men tell us much about the nature of the Mennonite Brethren Church during the era of their leadership. The author recognizes that not everything is to be lauded, but he sees the leaders as important human instruments in promoting the spiritual vitality of the church.